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Vol. II

# Regent Square Pulpit.

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## SERMONS

BY THE

REV. JOHN McNEILL.

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VOLUME II.

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# Regent Square Pulpit.

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THE RAPTURE OF ELIJAH.

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## A Sermon

DELIVERED IN REGENT SQUARE CHURCH,  
ON SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 11TH, 1890, BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

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2 KINGS ii. 11-14.

It is a strange, weird light that gathers over this wonderful story. There are many points, very vivid "points of light," gleaming with interest for the spiritual mind and imagination. May some of them shine into us as we meditate upon the scene.

Elijah, as you know, is coming to the end of his earthly ministry. Intimation in some secret but unmistakable way has been made upon his spirit that his warfare is accomplished, and that he is soon to enter upon his rest and reward. Elisha, too, has got an inkling, has got more than an inkling, of what is going to happen. The scene opens with them "going on, and talking;" these two who have been so much together and who so soon shall be parted from each other—as it is put farther on, "Elisha saw him no more." Well, that brings us—does it not?—to a common, a very

ordinary experience, though in a most uncommon setting. I should like for a little, at first, to dwell upon it. A common and ordinary experience; for—

“Friend after friend departs;  
Who hath not lost a friend?  
There is no union here of hearts  
That finds not here an end.”

And I may go on to say—

“Were this frail world our final rest,  
Living or dying, none were blest.”

But the helpful thing to notice here is the calmness with which, even in Old Testament times—which we are apt to speak of as dark and dim, with an outlook somewhat grey and leaden as regards the other side of the narrow stream of death—the calmness, I say, with which these two Old Testament saints go forward to the separation. The one is to go “forward into light,” and the other is to be left—left without Elijah! How would you have liked it? Elisha was to be left in all the turmoil of his time, left without his right hand, left without the very strength of his arm and the light of his eye. I do not know of any two New Testament saints who could have done that walk to the Jordan better, so calm, so quiet, especially in its last stretch, so matter of fact. Great thoughts, no doubt, were burning and struggling in each breast, but no sign was given of anything like distraction; no sign of either being alarmed; no fearful tugging at the heart-strings, as if all life was coming to one swift catastrophe: for the sentence is

gone forth, and this strong one is to be taken away, and that gentle one is to be left just when greater strength, greater force than ever seem to be needed. Might we not learn something from that walk to the Jordan, and might we not learn it to-day? My friends, here we are gathered together, and, like Elijah and Elisha, we too—I and you—I will put the whole audience into one, even as I am one here, for present purposes of illustration—we two “are going on, and talking.” I am speaking to you on great and pregnant themes, and your hearts’ feelings are talking back to me; and we are going on, unless the Lord return, to this experience when, sooner or later, we shall see each other no more. Or, let me illustrate more aptly by that one sitting next you: your husband or your wife, your Elijah or Elisha, your companion in the Lord’s work, or worship, or in business, or society. Now, we also are travelling to the place and time of separation: how do we think of it? Might not the Lord make it a great blessing to us to-day to take up that very thought and look at it broadly, in the light of this narrative, and in the light of all New Testament interpretations and applications of it. Can we look in each other’s faces to-day, not with grief, or apprehension, or dismay at the thought of parting, but with calmness and self-control? Can we say, not audibly—we may not do that—but each in his heart, of that other “Well, I thank God, that we have met; pleasant and sweet, holy and happy, through grace, has been our intercourse together? And, although we must separate; for here we have no continuing city, here there is no abiding, here



“Congregations *do* break up,  
And Sabbaths have an end,”

here, there is but a step between us and death; still, bless God, I can think of it all with calmness. If not without tears, certainly without frenzy or despair. It would have been unworthy of Elijah and Elisha, and unworthy of that great God who was the Light and Hope of both of them, if this last walk had been accomplished otherwise. Aye, let us look, I say, at that grim breaker-up, that grim separator, that divider called death. Let us look at him in the light of what God has revealed in this Book, and say to him, “Where are thy terrors, where are thy alarms?” They are simply abolished, obliterated—“Our Lord Jesus Christ hath abolished death, and hath brought light and immortality to life by His Gospel.” So that even should the Lord tarry, we can go on, with that dark flowing Jordan in front of us, we can go on calmly and confidently, *if we are related to each other as Elijah and Elisha were related to each other, and to Him*. Then, after all partings, there will come meetings again. Elijah and Elisha are together to-day. They walk with Christ to-day, they enjoy the unbroken, the perfect fellowship and worship and service of the upper sanctuary.

As it happened to them, not otherwise shall it happen to us who are united here to-day to each other, and to God, as they were. But, oh, my hearer, if the bond between us is not the bond that tied Elijah and Elisha to each other and to God, then be not deceived—we *shall* separate. You sit there close to a godly man in that seat, but there is an awful

separation in front of you, my friend. You sit as close and as near seemingly to God and Divine things, to His worship, to His work, and to His promise, to the trials here, and the great rewards hereafter. You seem to be companions ; but what if it should not be so ? Remember the first Psalm : “ Sinners may stand *here* in the congregations of the righteous, but not *there*.” “ The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the (great final) congregation of the righteous.” God is sifting and winnowing all our fellowships here ; and often, I fear, “ one is taken, and the other left.” The truly righteous goes to his own place and company ; and the mere sham, the formalist, the hypocrite, who only wears the name and dress, the external appearance, no matter how close the imitation, shall go to his own place, too—the outer darkness. Ah ! many are the thoughts, my hearers, some glad, some heavy, that come into a preacher’s heart as he thinks of those two “ going on, and talking.” How is it with us as we go on and talk ? Are we one in spirit, as Elijah and Elisha were ? one in hope, one in prospect, one for all eternity ; with all partings, even the last, mere incidents of to-day, which shall be forgotten or remembered only to increase the joy when we meet on the other side to-morrow ?

Oh, my soul, how near eternity is. We, too, are “ going on and talking ”—let our walk and conversation have this ever in view, for this will tell on the walk and talk. Suppose that on this Sabbath we assemble here, and on the next the one who came with us to-day is gone. I know the mind will then instinctively go back to that last conversa-

tion, and maybe a blush of shame will come up as we think of what was said, and as we think of how unworthy our talk was, looked at in the light of what has happened since. "Oh, if I and my friend who walked to Regent Square with me last Sabbath, if as we went on our way and talked—God help us—if we had only known that we were within a few hours of eternity, how different our conversation would have been. How we talked about this, and that, and the other; the paltry gossip of a penny paper, perhaps, on the blessed Sabbath of God, and the dawn of eternity almost breaking on my friend's face! Oh, if we had only known!" My brethren, let it come home to our very hearts. "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness." "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear. And so much the more as ye see the day approaching." God grant that when we are separated—that when I go from you, and you go from me, there may be no shame as we think of each other; and may we not have to think of how poor, how feeble, how positively bad it may be, was our talk the last time we were together. Oh, that to-day we may become more heavenly-minded, and that our speech may be always with grace, seasoned with salt! In all our communings together as Christian men and women, may we remember the parting, and be kind and faithful, holy and helpful to each other; so that when the separation comes, those who are left may find in the memory of us a store, a rich treasure. What Elisha's memory would bring up in after days, in trying and troubled times, from the very recollec-



tion of those holy fields over which they had passed together. To-day, then, let those who fear the Lord speak often one to another; and afterwards, when we go from each other, how helpful will such holy memories be!

“ More sweet than odours caught by him who sails  
Near spicy shores of Araby the Blest,  
A thousand times more exquisitely sweet,  
The freight of holy feeling which we meet,  
In thoughtful moments, wafted by the gale,  
From fields where good men walk,  
Or bowers wherein they rest.”

May we leave such a rich treasure behind us to those who are soon to lose us for a time, if that be in the providence of God!

“ It came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.” I cannot describe it, I can only read it. But what a wonderful scene it must have been; and how it tells us this, at any rate—how like Elijah’s departure was to all the rest of his life. My friends, you and I may take this out of it—what shall be the manner of my departure, I do not know; but the argument is strong, the presumption is most likely, that I shall die as I live. I rather think that if as a living Christian I am moping and sighing, and never have any great strength or brightness, very likely I may depart with barely enough to die on, as I had barely enough to live on. But if I would prepare myself an abundant entrance—which also means an abundant exit—after this life’s journey, let me trim and plume myself

a little more for it here and now. My friends, if you want Elijah's exit and entrance into heaven, you must have a little more of Elijah to-day. Let us to-day be a little more triumphant, to-day a little more swift and bright and beautiful on this side of the Jordan, on this side of the narrow stream that divides this Canaan from the heavenly. Let us to-day have a little more of Elijah's determination—"As the Lord God of Hosts liveth, before whom I stand." Let us to-day show more boldness, and less fear of man; let us to-day take our life in our hand, and brave it out with the world and before the world.

Alas! some of us are very humdrum Christians, and we can hardly expect a very bright or triumphant departure. If the end is to be what the course has been, *what a tame ending it must be!* I do not say we shall miss heaven; through grace we shall not. But oh, how little *light* there will be in our departure; and for those who attend and witness our departure, how little encouragement there will be, if they see no more than is now to be seen in our days of activity and opportunity! How many lights will be at their feeblest; they are so awfully feeble now! If the "finish" is to be like the race, our arrival at the goal will scarcely excite the enthusiasm of the great cloud of witnesses.

"Elijah went up," but, alas, alas! your preacher cannot. I am in the body, in this tabernacle of clay that weighs down both mind and heart and imagination. See that chariot, with its "axles of brightness" and wheels of flame, flash forward "on the path of the thunder," as the poet describes it. Think of Elijah going up. "Elijah went up by a whirl-

wind into heaven." There is a heaven, there is an appointed end to every true and faithful servant of God. You do not tumble into the grave, and that is the last of you. My brother, my sister, living for Christ in this great Babylon of London—have no doubt about it, you will see Him, you will stand in His presence; there is a heaven, there is a terminus to this earthly pilgrimage, and it is bright and grand and glorious, sure and certain. Do not lose sight of it, do not forget it for a single instant. Elijah went *up*. Listen to that, oh Ahab! listen to that, thou cursing Jezebel! Elijah! thou hast lost him for ever. "Thou didst swear, and say his life should be as the life of thy priests whom he slew." See how empty thy curse is. "Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." What infinite contempt God has poured upon all Elijah's enemies! And He will do the same with mine for me. We are going up, my believing friends; we are sore held down just now, but we are none the less destined to rise. Elijah went up—then the old proverb is true, "Threatened folk live long." Indeed they do; threatened Christians are going to live for ever.

I wish we could believe it. I think I see Elijah going up into heaven. What a welcome he gets from the angels that line the golden streets. Elijah sweeping right up to the presence of his God and King, to receive the welcome, "Well done." Oh, what an inspiring sight for a servant of Christ to-day—Elijah going at a bound clean above the world, the flesh, and the devil, into his rest and his reward! Many a trying day he had had, days when, if God had not sent the ravens to feed him, his life would have perished,

times when a price was set on his hand, and he had to skulk across the country through the night, and to hide in dens by day, for everywhere they were out hunting for him. But now—

“Servant of God—Well done,  
Praise be thy new employ,  
And while eternal ages run,  
Rest in thy Master’s joy.”

“Elijah went up in a whirlwind into heaven;” and God will not leave *me*. Already those heavenly steeds are harnessed to the chariot, already they are waiting the permission to come. Do not go away and say, “Why tarry the wheels of His chariot?” They do not tarry. “The Lord is not unrighteous to forget your labours of love.” Old Christmas Evans, another Welsh Elijah, another great warrior for truth and righteousness, of a former day and generation—Christmas Evans, when he was dying, must have had some vision of this Old Testament story, for as he bade his friends good-bye, and turned his face to the wall, he waved his hand and said, “Good-bye; drive on!”—what a triumphant exit!

“And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more; and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; and he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over.”



I felt as if I was strained a little when I had to speak of what after all cannot be described—the glory to which Elijah was caught up. But there is no need of straining here. We are back again now to what took place on the earthly side of that curtain, that veil of sense, which hangs dark between time and eternity. We are on familiar ground; and yet how supernaturally this natural life was lived by Elisha after the vision—the revelation he had received! You will remember Elisha's petition. He asked for a double portion of his master's spirit. Which does not mean that he wanted to be twice as great a man as his master; it means that he spoke in terms of the Old Testament, and that he asked for the eldest son's portion. He virtually said, "Well, Elijah, you are the father of us all—of us sons of the Prophets who are soon to be at the work; make me your eldest child; give me a double portion." And Elijah said, "Thou hast asked a hard thing." He did not ask for Elijah's staff, or his mantle, or for a lock of his hair. That is what some of us would have done. We would have asked for a lock of his hair, or for some such poor stupid relic, and we would have taken it out now and again, and showed it, and wept over it. Ah! I am not wanting to trample on your griefs and tenderest susceptibilities; but is it wise, my friend, to have these relics and to turn them to the use you do? Like an old acquaintance of mine, who almost once a week climbs away up into a room to take out the little boots and other like articles, that she may indulge in a very luxury of grief over them. Is it wise? Elisha did not so ask or act. Elisha

did not ask for relics. Elisha said, "Give me a double portion of thy spirit;" and Elijah said, "If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee: but if not, it shall not be so." How it brings Christ and the New Testament before us, and the parting scene between Christ and His disciples! That parting scene is still the standpoint for us. Can we see Him who has ascended? We there, like Elisha here, are tested. That is where the "if," the condition of power and blessing, comes in.

"If," says our Lord virtually, "if you can see Me as I ascend into the heavens, you will get Me; if you can see Me, although I am absent, I will be with you; if you can see Me, you will do My works, and greater works than these, because I go to the Father, and enter into those conditions in which through you I can reproduce, and more than reproduce, whatever I did in the flesh and on the earth." The resurrection has not taken Christ from us, it has bestowed Him in tenfold power upon us, *if only we see Him*. But, my friend, if you are only a believer in an historical Christ, who once said and did things, and that is the end of Him, you have not got His life, and you cannot have His power. But if, after the fashion of Elisha, if even while Christ is taken from you, you can by faith see Him now more vividly than ever, living, risen, ascended — that moment He descends with you and in you. Like the disciples who, after Christ was taken from them, went away back to Jerusalem, as if they had never missed Him. He ascended into heaven, and they returned to Jerusalem, not mourning, not sighing, not crying, and saying, "Now He is

gone we are utterly undone ;” they returned to Jersualem *with great joy*. They had Him, they had not lost Him, they had the double portion ; Christ was more real to them ; though He was withdrawn from their eyes, He reappeared to their hearts more vividly than He had in the flesh. Now, that is what Elisha got away back in the Old Testament : he believed in all that was symbolized for him in that opening of the heavens. From that day and forward, the door was standing wide, God and salvation and eternity lay all round about him. Elijah gone, as regards the flesh, absent as regards the body, but present as regards the spirit, and the God of Elijah nearer and more powerful in and through him than ever.

Then, friends, as we go out to-day to do our work, the Word narrows itself to this : “ Are we men and women who can see the unseen ? ” Before we start out to work for God, to testify for Christ, do we see the invisible ? Are we believers in a risen Saviour ? Have we got the promise of the Master ? Are we endowed with power from on high ? Ah ! what a power will come to all Christ’s Church to-day, if she only gets Elisha’s blessing, and if she gets the blessing of the New Testament Elishas—Paul, and Peter, and James, and John, and all the rest of them at Pentecost, when they got just such a vivid realization of Christ as their ascended Saviour, that in that might and power they went forth, and the works of Christ were done more powerfully than they were by Himself in the days of His flesh.

“ And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of

Elijah?" Only look at that, and then I will let you go. That is the great question. Not, Where is Elijah? We are not going to discuss, in a dreamy way, What is heaven like; where is it; how are the conditions of things there? We have got to live an actual life down here, and the great question for us is not, Where are the dead? We are not to mope and sigh, and say, "Oh, that Elijah and Elisha were here! oh, that Knox were here! oh, that Luther were here! oh, that Calvin were here! oh, that Wesley were here! oh, that Whitfield were here!" but rather, Where is the *Lord God* of Luther, and of Knox, and of Whitfield, and of Wesley? Elisha might have made himself the most conspicuous fool in Old Testament history; he did very nearly, but he grandly rose above the danger of it. You might have had Elisha standing by the Jordan—the Jordan lying between him and his work, mark you—you might have had him standing by the bank of the Jordan with Elijah's cloak, saying, "I have the cloak of Elijah," and "laying on" those waters with it, all his might, but only wetting the mantle, and never dividing the river. The most ridiculous figure in Old Testament history, and the most contemptible, might have been Elisha with the very mantle of Elijah striking the waters, trying to do what Elisha did, and calling mightily on Elijah, and yet the waters as deep and rushing and unyielding as ever. Is not that what the Church of Christ sometimes comes to; calling on dead saints, calling for men, claiming Apostolic succession—that contemptible rag and figment—trying to split and dry up the Jordan with that, while the Jordan flows on as sullenly and as contemptuously as ever?

Is there any power in that article (here the preacher held up his Geneva gown) to save men? Suppose it was even Elijah's own, what mortal good could it do even you or me? What is there in office, and function, and dress, and name, and place? Next to nothing. If we have not the power of God Almighty, we are only making the world laugh contemptuously. Instead of beginning to try and trace out whether I come in a straight line down from the Apostles, and that I have the very cloak that was left at Troas, let me seek for the God of the Apostles. Supposing I *had* the cloak, how much the better would I be? The Lord deliver us from all sacerdotalism, and from all stupidity and priestcraft of every kind, both Protestant and Popish, both high-church and low-church, and no church at all. And from the Popery that is deep in us which is crying out, "Oh, if we only had this, and that, and the other." Where is God—the Lord God of Elijah? Not where is Elijah, not where is Guthrie, and Chalmers, and James Hamilton? In reply to that question, a voice answers from heaven—God answers down sharply when we ask such questions—"These men are here; what do you want with them? Cannot you let the wearied sleep? Cannot you let tired saints rest? They have entered into peace; they rest in their beds. What do you want with a dead leader, or with his cloak?" Let us rather say, "O Lord, forgive us! that is not what we want; we want thee, O God!" He is not the successor of Elijah who wears Elijah's cloak, and tries to fill Elijah's office; but he is Elijah's successor who has the God of Elijah with him,

and who in the name of God does, in his own fashion, with his own tone and characteristics and emphasis, Elijah's work.

Now, it is given to you and me to-day to lay hold of the God of Elijah, to come into living contact with the great residue of all power, and to get ourselves filled for our work in our day and in our generation. May the God of Elijah, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, hear our cry! May we see our weakness and our helplessness, and may He deliver us from the scoffs of the enemy by filling us to-day with His own risen and ascended power! The spirit of Elijah rested upon Elisha. Not by might, not by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord. Lord, endue us with power From On High. Amen.





# Regent Square Pulpit.

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THE GOSPEL OF HARD WORK.

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## A Sermon

DELIVERED IN REGENT SQUARE CHURCH,  
ON SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 18TH, 1890, BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

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“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might ; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”—ECCLES. ix. 10.

A CALL to work, and a reason attached or annexed to the call ! It is a strange old Book, the Book of Ecclesiastes. Perhaps of all Books in the Bible, I find myself getting to like it most and best without comment or commentator. Some call it pessimistic. I do not think it should be called either pessimistic or optimistic. I do not think we should try to fix upon it either of these two labels—each alike is too narrow and limited. Sometimes it is the one, and sometimes it is the other, but it is not distinctly the one or the other. Certainly, whatever it may be, it is not shallow. The difficulty, I suppose, in describing or labelling the Book lies here : it is so complex, so varied, so thoroughgoing, or reckless, if you like, in every way. This is not the pessimism of “the moping owl, which from yonder ivy-mantled tower doth to the moon complain.” The world is not a

ruin. neither is it the unreasoned optimism of the cuckoo on a soft, bright summer's morning, looking at everything in a shimmering haze, and gently repeating that this is the best of all possible worlds—for a cuckoo! The world is not at its best. The Book seems to be like a grave, reverend, greatly-travelled, much-experienced, but still God-fearing man. I would like to come to the man of this Book were I in great trouble, or were I in great joy, or were I disturbed by certain "views of life." He seems to be almost or only stern and cold; stoical and cynical; but when you come close to him, you see he is not without tenderness, and a certain chastened hopefulness. If you are too enthusiastic, too hot, too excited, he draws that spirit all out of you, but takes care to breathe it back again, rectified. If you are too moping, or dull, he takes that out of you; and you will find, when you have let him say his say to the end, that you are neither in a screaming state of fanaticism and over-enthusiasm, nor are you dogged and sullen, or limp and lifeless. The end is neither infidelity, atheism, nor agnosticism. This is the conclusion of the whole hurly-burly and up-and-down of the business; its time and chance, its sadness, and its gladness, and its seemingly inextricable whirl. "Let us hear the conclusion," says he, "of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man; for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Go on your way; plough out *your* furrow; hoe out *your* row; do not be too much uplifted, and do not be too much downcast. Here there is nothing abiding. But God, and righteousness, and truth abide, and shall abide for ever.

Here is a text in the midst' of much that seems to be

melancholy—much that seems to be almost jaundiced. It is as though the writer went down and stood yonder at the Mansion House corner, in the midst of all the swim, and said, “What a bother and swelter and helter-skelter for nothing!” He seems to be jaundiced or cynical—but he is not that, for he breaks out here, and says, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” He is not throwing the wet blanket over us, he is taking the wet blanket off; telling us to rouse ourselves; to remember how brief is our stay among the things of time; sobering us, settling us, taking all surcharge of either joy or sorrow out of us, and putting us under not a crushing, but a working pressure. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.”

“*Whatsoever.*” Notice, then, coming out of this text—and you know it is widened and deepened by many a Scripture besides, both in the Old Testament and the New, which comes flying to it, as we lift it up and make it prominent—notice, friends, how the Word of God has an eye to the whole scope and area and circumference of our life. “*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.*” The Bible is sometimes spoken of by people who neither read it nor practise it as being moonshine, as being so hazy and impracticable a Book that it does not look at present facts in actual life. A Book that talks a great deal about far-away things; abstractions, so they say, such as sin, and grace, and so on. It is a Book that talks about things that we *think* to be far away, and it brings them in upon us; and it is a Book which also lifts into the light of God and eternity whatever thing your hand finds to do. It is the most practical Book you ever read; it is

the wisest Book for worldly wisdom that ever man opened. I saw a book the other day on a bookstall entitled, "How to Make Money." I never dreamed of spending two shillings on buying that book : it is all in here, in the Bible ; you can get it all for a penny from the British and Foreign Bible Society—everything about how to make money, and how to avoid losing money. I saw another book entitled, "The Evils of Gambling Exposed" ; but really I did not buy it. It is all in here ; all those evils are exposed here. And, again, I saw another book on "The Evils and Perils of the Stock Exchange." It is not worth buying, for it is all in here ; it is all here splendidly. The Bible a book that does not refer to daily life ? Why, it is a libel on the Book, and can only be uttered by people who do not read it, and who know the reason why—they are afraid to read it. "*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do.*" Let us begin at the very lowest level—your daily work, my brother ; your daily task, my sister. Says this Book, "Live ever under the Great Taskmaster's eye." If you are a servant in the kitchen, right on up to the Queen on the throne, "*Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with thy might.*" This text, and many another like it, reminds you that you live under the eyes of your Master, who is looking over your shoulder, and it tells you to do the work a little better—"do it with thy might ;" put head, and heart, and conscience, and will, and energy, human and divine, into it—be your best in everything. Have we learnt this for our daily life ? I speak here especially—I am only entitled to speak, perhaps, specially—to young men ; my young brother, here is a word for you. You want enthusiasm ; oh, if you want to get that safely and successfully, make God's Word your strength. Your secular energy, your wisdom for this world, let it be

found in this Book, and "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Do it not with weakness, not with one hand, not with what you can spare, but "be at it, all at it, and always at it." The Bible an impracticable book? The Bible rings with common sense, and we have got so little common sense, because we have got so little of the Bible in us. "*Whatsoever thy hand.*" Are you a quill-driver? Then drive it a little better; consecrate your pen-power to this Book, and to Him who stands behind it. Perhaps the want of that has been the ruin of you in your daily life. You grumble and complain, and think you have not a sphere suited to your great capabilities. Maybe I saw your master before I saw you to-day, and he has a different verdict. He says you *have* capabilities and powers, but that you need this text as the steam-power to drive them, and you have not got it. You are not using them; you are set to smaller things just now, and you are doing them in a careless and slack way; and while you are looking all abroad, wondering where you can see a place worthy of your ambitions, your master tells me he is on the verge of paying you off. Pardon me for putting it as plainly as that—that is one application of the "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do." My good woman, in your work at home—my servant lassie—"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do"—remember this text, and get your energy here—do it for God, do it with the calm daylight of eternity breaking over your face.

Religion won't spoil you in any kind of secular work, it will make you sacred in the midst of all the dangers of secularity. As I said to a company of working-men's wives, not long ago, so I say here: there is more polishing-paste in this text than we have ever taken out of it. It would

wonderfully scour and brighten everything, if we could get it extracted and applied. It is a perfect battery of energy ; would God it might get into us ! “ Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do.” A call to diligence ! Oh, the mournful letter that came to me some time ago from a student who has been dodging up and down to College for the last eight or ten years. He tells me that he knows, and his fellows admit, that he has more than average ability ; his professors admit it ; but he is a dead failure for want of energy, steadiness, and application. For want of God, and the truth of God, he is a ruin for this world, and for the next—a mere thing of putty or stucco in the hands of circumstances. There is no stiffening in him, no backbone in him, and very likely this Book, which would put it into him, he never reads. Ruskin says, “ You may find a clever man who is also an indolent man ; but you never find an indolent man who is truly a *great man*.” “ And,” he says, “ whenever I hear of any young man starting out in the battle of life, and praised as being a man of promise, a man of genius, I always ask just one question, ‘ Does he work ? ’ ” That is a true criticism, “ Does he work ? ” “ The gods sell all things to man for labour,” can easily be made a Christian utterance by changing “ gods ” into *God*. God sells all things to man for labour. “ The very kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” A trumpet call to energy, to sanctification of all our powers, as under our Master’s eye. When we go back to our daily task—whatever you are going to do, in work, in purpose, in enterprise, do it—up and do it. Do not merely think, don’t dawdle, do not idle, do not dream. Young or old, rich or poor, mistress or maid, master or man, do not spend thy time in day-dreaming, in star-gazing, in hatching schemes



in your imagination, and in thinking marvellous things—of a benevolent nature, for example—that are only castles in the air, and “wee bit fuffin’ lowes” (flickering flames), as our Scotch song says. Master, were you *thinking* of giving your clerks a rise? Well, for heaven’s dear sake, go and do it. Do it heartily; write off the amount, and let the thing be done. Were you *thinking* of making some new start? The Bible does not say that, because eternity and the judgment are ahead, you are to forget the things of time, and shut yourself in a cloister. The Bible gives the best rein to every legitimate ambition and power within. Let go; drive on ahead if only this is your driving-power. It will give the rein, and a free head to all that is in you; while, to change the figure, it will save you from explosion and disaster. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.”

Then let us apply it to spiritual work. I am speaking to a congregation of worshippers, a congregation of Christian people so far advanced that we are soon—in the evening—to be sitting down at the Lord’s Table. And I am not conscious of the slightest incongruity between this text and the other one which will be on my tongue in the round of a few hours: “Do this in remembrance of Me.” It is only a splendid illustration of the vast sweep and scope of my text, and of many another like it. Well might David say—and he knew what he was talking about, being a man who knew life from the herd-laddie right up to the king on the throne—“I have seen an end of all perfection, but Thy commandment is exceeding broad.” High as heaven, deep as hell, longer than the earth, broader than the sea; catching within its grasp everything from eternity and to eternity, and every item of your humble life and

mine in between. Calling us with one breath "grasshoppers," and with the next breath telling us that grass-hoppers and all as we are, the eyes of the Eternal God are bent upon our leapings and chirpings among the grass all the little while we are here. That is the Bible, and that is the text. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do," from sweeping under the mats, to taking thy share in the Sacrament, "do it with thy might." For daily toil—no laziness, no mere scheming, and no jerry-building; it is all condemned in here. And for express spiritual work, the same injunction. But, my brother, have you got the *spiritual* hand—have you? Let me illustrate what I mean by that man in the New Testament—you remember him—the man with the withered hand. Do not imagine I am sending you to spiritual work, if you have not the hand to do it, and the heart behind the hand to drive and guide it. But you may get it to-day. Would you fain do spiritual work—work for God, evangelical work, work along Christ's own line in every direction, building gold and silver and precious stones, not wood and hay and stubble, on the splendid foundation—*Himself*? But are you like the man with the withered hand? Well, my brother, He can restore the hand where you sit; He can give you the power before He sends you out. He will do it to-day, if you will only let Him, if you will only ask Him—power for whatever thine hand findeth to do for the Lord.

Oh, how many men and women in London are needing a *saving* hand! I often think we are like a man standing on the lip of a rushing stream. As we are watching it rush past, suddenly there is a man, or woman, or child drowning—God help them; but swept for an instant within our reach. Have you the grasping hand, the saving hand? If

so, put it out to save that soul from death ; be quick about it, look as if you meant it. Whatever your hand findeth to do for Christ, in preaching the Gospel, in saving the perishing, pluck your hand out of your bosom, and do it ; out with it, all the length. And if it seems to be too short, and you are too weak, call on God that He may give saving power to your right hand. The Jews have a tradition that the man with the withered hand was a mason, a stone-cutter. Think of a stone-cutter with a withered right hand ! That man is spoiled. And Christ, I think, had pity on him, because He knew all that lay behind the mason with the withered hand—the despondent wife, the helpless children. And He said, “Stretch forth thine hand ; and it was restored whole as the other.” I think when that man read his Old Testament and came to this verse, he would say, “Oh ! I never noticed that before ; that is for me. Whatsoever that restored hand,” he would say to himself, “finds to do” —take care man, that is God’s hand, never put that hand to dirty work. He would say to his wife and children sometimes, “Do you see that hand ? That is the hand that Jesus gave me ; and whatsoever it finds to do, it is His.” “Holiness unto the Lord” must be stamped upon it. “If I forget Thee, oh Jesus, may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, may my right hand forget its cunning.” Now, if you have got the hand, use it, *use it*. You will get plenty of opportunities to-day in London to use the restored right hand.

And if you have not got it, ask Him, and He will give it you. Christ will not see you with a withered hand in London if He can help it, but will restore it. Then be sure to use it. I feel it to-day myself. What my hand finds to do just now, and my tongue, is to preach this to you. Therefore pardon me if I put it without polite and smoothed

phrases—I am trying to speak in the language of the text, and I pray that God may help me every time to be its vivid and personal illustration. Oh, for energy, Divine energy! Oh, that the laziness may be taken out of us, and that the right hands that are here, redeemed right hands, may be busy doing with their might what there is such an abundant opportunity to do to-day. “Are you taking on any hands?” said a man to another whom he came to see. I hope you are saying the same where you are sitting. Yes, we are taking on hands; how many have you? Remember the chapter we read from the first Epistle to the Corinthians. *There* is a great work that our hands have to do: building on yon foundation; building, I trust, not wood, hay, and stubble, but gold, and silver, and precious stones. Do that with thy might; be diligent; be particular with your own heart, your own life, your own character, my brother, my sister. In these humdrum days of time, build your character carefully, persistently, diligently, without slackening, without scamping, for the fire will find out on the testing day of what sort your work was. Build that house, that temple, in which God and you, or you *without God*, are to live for ever and ever.

“In the elder days of art,  
Builders wrought with greatest care  
Each minute and unseen part;  
For the gods see everywhere.

“Let us do our work as well,  
Both the unseen and the seen;  
Make the house where God shall dwell  
Beautiful, entire, and clean.

“Else our lives are incomplete,  
Standing in these walls of time;  
Broken stairways where the feet  
Stumble as they climb.

“Build to-day, then, strong and sure,  
With a firm and ample base,  
And ascending and secure,  
Shall to-morrow find its place.”

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,” in secular work, in saving work, in character-building, do it, do it with thy might. It will pay splendidly in the end.

“For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” That is the motive for all this energy. Does it not seem as if our preacher has made a mistake? When he brings the thought of death forward as a motive to energy, is he not forgetting himself? Surely we must be justified in saying, “Why, preacher, that will only subtract all energy out of me. You tell me to look ahead and see that split in the ground, that crack in the clay in front of me, to see that fissure—the grave—that is opening for me, and you tell me I am to work with my might, for I will soon tumble in. Is that sensible?” Yes, I think it is. I think we are all wrong about death. I think we ought not to make death a paralyzer—a gloomy thing to frighten. Not only from the New Testament, but from the Old Testament, we may learn a different side of death. Go round to the other side and you will find in the thought of your departure an encouragement to do your day’s work like an honest man, so that you will enjoy your sleep when bedtime comes. We do not, some of us, sleep at night, and then we go tormenting the doctor. Let the doctor alone; you are almost forcing the man to tell lies. The doctor tells me to say, “If you will do an honest day’s work, there will be nothing wrong with you at night; you will sleep like others.” Some people need the advice of Dr. Abernethy to one of his patients. He said, “Live on sixpence a day, and earn it.”

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might,” for the day is hastening to its close, my friends, everything is passing away. Even since we came in here, this bright May day is flying away forward to the judgment-seat, to await our coming there. Already the sun is not so bright as when we came in; already it is twenty minutes past noon; already this blessed, bright May day is making ready to descend into the shades of night. Do not despair, do not sigh, do not mope, do not say, “This takes all pith and stamina out of me:” it does not. A horse never runs better than when it is running for the stable; and we may all be doing that through God’s grace and mercy. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might,” for the night is coming, and God will put no man on the night-shift, not one of us. He is not a hard taskmaster; He is not a sweater; He will not bully us; He will not fag us; He will not harass us. He is not an Egyptian taskmaster, with the lash, keeping us toiling for ever in the brick-fields, until we have become as sunburnt as the clay we are working with. Not He. He is kind and gracious, only He knows we are lazy, my brother, and that is why He speaks like this. He knows that even the best of us need to have the spur. All mankind since the fall have been naturally lazy in getting up again. That is what is wrong. And even grace seems to have a hard battle, first to get us up, and then to keep us going.

Now there is a motive power. Take up the thought of death on this May Sabbath morning, and look at it brightly. Let the May sun shine upon it; let in the light of the Word of God, and you will go along and do your day’s work, not sighing, but with fifty pounds more to the square inch than you had before. “I must work the works of Him



that sent Me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work." Ah! of course I know, I am not forgetting that I am speaking in New Testament times; and that the motive which is here brought from the grave is transformed and transfigured. Let me not forget to set it in the transfiguring light of our great expectation—not the grave, but the Lord's return. Now, my brother, between these two, the thought of your going to Him through the tunnel of the grave, and the thought of His coming back to you by rending the heavens "in such an hour as ye think not," by these two propulsions combined, be diligent; "pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." "Let those that weep be as though they wept not; and they that possess as though they possessed not; for the fashion of this world passeth away." The grave is opening, or the Lord is coming back to reckon with His servants. "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

So whatever way you put it, you hear the trumpet call to energy. Be not lethargic, then, nor despondent.

"So live that when thy summons comes  
To join the innumerable caravan  
That moves to the pale realms of shade,  
Where each must take his chamber  
In the silent halls of death,—  
Thou go, not like the quarry slave,  
Scourged to his dungeon,  
But sustained and soothed by an unfaltering trust;  
Approach thy grave like him  
Who wraps the drapery of his couch around him  
And lies down to pleasant dreams."

How wonderfully death has become transformed, and all the fear and gloom taken out of it! And the sight of Death looking at me doing my work makes me bend my back to

do it more diligently than ever. For I know you, Death, now. You used to be a terror, you used to be a fright, I used to look on you as an interrupter, and the destroyer of all my plans. And some of us have still so much of that notion, that when a bright young spirit dies, we raise above his tomb—heaven help us, poor pagans—we raise a broken column! There is no idea like that in this Word of God. The day's work is done, and the departed has gone away to stand before his Master. I say, how that does change all! Is it not George Herbert who said:

“Death, thou wast once an uncouth, hideous thing,  
Nothing but bones,  
The sad effect of sadder groans;  
Thy mouth was open, but thou could'st not sing.

“But since our Saviour's death did put some blood  
Into thy face,  
Thou art grown fair and full of grace,  
Much in request, much sought for, as a good?”

Death is the next best to the Lord's return. Now, I say, let us get this double belt put over our driving-wheel, and it will secure our diligence till the night comes, when no man is asked to work, or can work; and when we go home to enjoy our rest and our reward. I knew a brother student once who dreamt that in a month's time he was going to die. He dreamt it three times over in one night, and although he was naturally as prosaic and matter-of-fact as anybody I ever knew, that dream stuck to him. It was burned into him. Now, people would say that that stopped that man's work, that he simply sat and moped; shut himself in, and sent for the doctor. He did not; he never put in such a month's work in the district where he was missionary, never. It was a pity the vision faded away. It is a pity it

should fade away from any of us. It did him no harm, he never had such a month of personal holiness, and such a month of self-sacrifice; doing things with his might, both secular and sacred, for he had only a month, and then the judgment-seat, and Him who sits thereon. An old philosopher used to say to his disciples, "Turn to God the day before you die;" and of course his disciples said, "Well, but master, we do not know what day that is." "Therefore," said he, "be sure you turn to-day." Thus it always comes out, whatever way you like to turn, the great lesson from eternity is: Be diligent, and make the most of the passing day, for yourself, for your character, for your neighbour, for your God; for it will all meet you, and be part and parcel of you through eternity. This is the true "*Carpe diem*" philosophy.

Of Turner, his servant used to say, "I never knew him to be idle." Oh, how some who give themselves up to what we call worldly ambitions put Christians to shame! When he got an order for a picture, he went home, and the same day on which he got the order he spread the canvas, and he had the whole thing in dead colour before he went to bed. Next morning, early, he was at it again. The Lord put into us the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of hard work. You will not kill yourself by hard work along the lines of God's Book. "The more the marble wastes, the more the statue grows." How beautiful is this apostrophe!

"Life, we've been long together,  
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather.  
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear,  
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear;  
Then steal away; give little warning,  
Choose thine own time; say not 'Good night,'  
But in some brighter clime  
Bid me 'Good morning.'"

May such a life and such a departure be yours and mine. But just one other thought. I am not forgetting that we are coming to the Communion Table to-night. "Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, then, do it with thy might." In sight of Christ and His splendid doing for us, even unto death, wilt thou dare, my brother, my sister, to come to this table languidly, dragging thyself forward as though thou couldst barely come the length? Be ashamed of that: come with purpose; gird up thy loins; come, notwithstanding a thousand failures, a thousand things that ought to keep us miles away from that bread and that cup; come; He asks you to come.

Take the Sacrament with your might, not with your weakness. With thy might profess Jesus Christ—with hand and heart, with body, and soul, and spirit, in this Sacramental testimony.

"According to Thy gracious word,  
In meek humility,  
*This will I do*, my dying Lord,  
*I will* remember Thee."

Emphatically, heartily, unambiguously, with my might, I will do this in remembrance of Thee. Amen.



# Regent Square Pulpit.

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CHRIST OUR PASSOVER.

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## A Sermon

DELIVERED IN REGENT SQUARE CHURCH

BY THE

REV. JOHN McNEILL.

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“Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the basin; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning.”—EXODUS xii. 21-22.

I WISH you to bear in mind all that comes before and all that comes after, but mainly to fasten your thoughts upon this particular 22nd verse, as being the hinge round which the whole of this wonderful story of that night in Egypt is made to swing; and I should also like to take just one word from the lips of Paul in the New Testament, in order to connect this whole narrative with Gospel teaching, with Gospel doctrine and illustration. Paul gives us a headline for all that we have got to say or think about this old story of that night in Egypt, when he says in the 1st Corinthians, 5th chapter, and the 7th verse, referring to this very type, “Christ our passover is slain for us.” “Therefore,” he goes on to say, “Let us keep the feast.” Christ our passover is slain for us, and in that great blood-

shedding is all our salvation : " In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." In Him we have shelter from a doom compared with which the judgment that fell upon Egypt that night was a local, temporary, and small matter indeed. In Him we have a salvation which is not only, so to speak, from night till morning, but all through time's night till the eternal morning breaks—a salvation of which we get the beginnings here through faith in the blood of the Passover Lamb, but of which we shall sing through all eternity in the very words given to us in Revelation, " To Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, be glory." The Lamb, then, is all the glory of this Old Testament deliverance, and He is all the glory of the New Testament Church.

I wish this morning to evangelize my congregation, and to evangelize my own heart—to begin this week of special meetings, at the beginning ; with ourselves gathered together here, and by help of God's Word and Spirit to refresh in your hearts and in my own a few of those essential things about sin and salvation which are commonly, I had almost said too commonly, believed among us—too cheaply and too easily believed, but never sufficiently held with grip of heart and life.

The first thing that strikes one to say is this, that salvation then, that night, taking it in its narrow meaning—though always when I speak of our own circumstances, remember that I speak of salvation in its full-orbed meaning—salvation then and now is from impending doom.

Let us revive that essential idea of our most holy faith in all our hearts and minds. The times greatly need it. Salvation then was, and salvation now is, let me repeat it,



from impending doom. As there hung over Egypt that night the awful threat of God's descending wrath, so let my soul and yours never forget there hangs over this city the threat of impending vengeance. It has always been there. Nothing has been ever able to take that black cloud out of the sky; and as the times go on, methinks it gets not less black, but rather does it not look as if the world's dark night were thickening? Salvation from impending doom. And just because of that, a motive which worked that night upon the hearts of Israelites, and ought to work upon our hearts now, was, and should be, the element and moving principle of *fear*.

When I speak of impending doom, and then, when I say that out of that ought to come the urgent motive of fear, I know that naturally our hearts kick against that, and yet we must not shun to declare the whole counsel of God. My dear hearer, whether we like it or do not like it—whether we hear it or whether we forbear—such are the facts of revelation, and they receive their most powerful illustration in the Cross of Calvary, on which hung the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me reassert this: let me iterate and reiterate it—that fear is a legitimate motive in salvation. Perhaps the Israelites on that occasion were immediately drawn by loving obedience to obey what God had spoken. If so, they were different from you and me. If so, they were very much different from what they were on subsequent occasions; and I rather think that while some temperaments would just quietly and unquestioningly yield whenever Moses declared the mind and heart of God, as to what was coming of doom, and as to how salvation was to be secured, others would question; others would be reluctant; others would be very like

ourselves. But we do hope that, no matter how they felt "rubbed the wrong way" (if you will allow the familiar expression), they had sense enough, whether drawn by love or driven by fear, to sprinkle that blood and get in under its shelter in time, and stay there. So I say I stand not only on revelation. I stand on reason and common sense when I say if you have any glimmering of faith in God's Word at all—if you have any illumination of a natural kind to perceive that this world demands a time of doom and judgment—demands it, and will get it—then betake you as swiftly as you may to the one great refuge and shelter, while still the day of righteous wrath and revelation of God's judgment is withheld, and still the door of mercy stands wide open to the wall. Ah, yes, it is said to be unphilosophical: and men say, and they get others to write it for them in very grand and seemingly philosophical speech—that if you do not draw men with love, you will never drive them by fear. I do not believe a bit of it. It is not philosophy at bottom; it is sheer nonsense. Men are moved by fear every day. Why did you go and insure your house last week? Was it not through fear? Why did you insure your life last week, even though the doctor told you that there was nothing wrong with you? Was it not from fear? When you were walking in the country the other day, and came to a railway crossing, and an express train arrived at the very time, I rather think that the express train got the crossing first.

You instinctively drew back, did you not? because there is implanted in the very constitution of your body as a life-preserving principle this instinctively moving principle and element of fear. Grand men, large broad-browed men, are men who are moved by fear. Methinks Noah was a grand,

broad-browed man, and "Noah, moved by fear, prepared him an ark for the saving of his house." It was fear as well as love that clenched every bolt in it. I think that David was a broad-browed man. I think that he was a man of some mental girth and bulk and height, although he lived in what we call "ignorant old times" compared with this nineteenth century. And David said—what? David said, "For fear of Thee;" and in that he declares the very greatness of the soul that was in him—

"For fear of Thee my very flesh  
Doth tremble all dismayed;  
And of Thy righteous judgments, Lord,  
My soul is much afraid."

So never go away and boast, my friend, that you have such a big intellect that fear will not move you. You are simply declaring to all people who know what a shrivelled up creature you are. This is a real legitimate element in salvation. God works upon it. He plays upon that heart-string by His Word and by His Spirit. He did it then in that night in Egypt. He is doing it to-day; for although it is daylight, in another sense, the shadows and the gloom are thickening round about us; and again I repeat, drawn by love or driven by fear, see to it that you yield to God and to the truth of God, and betake you in time to the only safety.

Now, I should like to say further, re-stating some simple, but essential elements of Gospel revelation regarding sin and salvation, that salvation was of God's devising. Think of it, for we need to have that refreshed in our minds. It was altogether a matter of revelation. Nothing was left to man but bare obedience of mind and hand and foot. Mark that, I do not say that God spoke irrationally; I do not say

that God simply came and overmastered them with despotic tyrannical power, but I do say that God came forth out of His secret place that memorable night, and Himself devised the plan of salvation. I know that while I speak, every syllable is contemptuously scorned by some minds. God Himself devised the plan; I will talk better language when the nineteenth century gives it to me, and it has not done it yet. God Himself devised such a plan that no soul needed to be lost if that soul simply believed and obeyed. It was all of God, it was all of grace; so still. We so much talk and talk and talk, and write and write, and discuss this Gospel that, heaven help us! we almost begin to think that we devised it ourselves and brought it here. We have forgotten that it came, and comes essentially in word and power, straight from God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

That is a salvation worth preaching. Your tinkered-up human schemes—well, I will preach them when I have got through with this, but not till then. That is the only salvation. It was all of God; it was all of grace.

I say, I like that salvation. Time was when I did not care much about it. Time was when my main stumbling-block, and the main stumbling-block of some Christless souls here—and you scarcely think it, my dear brother—is, that we try to add something to it, or we try to take something from it. Beware of that. Let it stand in all its Divine simplicity. Believe, and you too will say that it is not against reason. It is not what you think it to be. Take it in. Act upon it, and you will say with the Christian poet, and with all of us, although we are not poets—

“How charming is Divine philosophy,  
Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose,  
But musical as is Apollo's lute,  
And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets,  
Where no crude surfeit reigns.”

Is there any man who will stand up and say that he is tired

of the Gospel who ever tasted the immediate sweetness of all its power on heart and mind. It was all of God, altogether, from first to last, so that all the praise and all the glory and all the gratitude were to be given, not to Moses, or to the elders, or to themselves, but where it was all due.

Then I should like to say a further thing about the plan of this salvation—for I want to repeat that phrase, “The Plan of Salvation,” so very offensive to the nineteenth century, as if God had no right to work by plan. It is the mark of every sensible man in the affairs of this world that he should have a plan—that he should work by rule and method, but the “plan of salvation” is scoffingly spoken of. I wish to say further, that on this night of this divinely appointed salvation, when it was received and obeyed, there were one or two things which would surely strike the recipients and those who were obedient to this heavenly revelation. “Draw out a lamb,” says Moses, speaking for God, “draw out a lamb and kill it, and take its blood and sprinkle it on the lintel and on the two side posts.” There is a point which I want to refresh in my own mind and yours. There is in this old story a point which has not died away with the actual circumstances which called it forth, but lives and abides for ever. That is the grand characteristic of the Word of God. It is living yet. Every Israelitish father who killed the lamb not simply with a knife and with his hand, but whose mind and heart were working behind the knife, must surely have had this thought borne upon him—“If I am not to die, something is to die.”

Substitution. Oh, let me ring it out! “For me, for me,” was bound to ring in his ears with every gurgling of that lapping blood. That again is the heart of the heart of salvation, for you and for me. There is a Saviour as innocent as that white, gentle, bleating, spotless lamb. See the father as he takes the lamb in his hand. Listen

to its helpless bleating, and just think of all the ideas of meekness and yielding innocence that flashed upon the mind; and again, I say, if you think of the Israelitish father killing it, not simply with his knife and with his hand, but with mind and heart and imagination working behind those outward instruments, surely there flashed upon his soul, "Life for life. If I am to go free, this innocent thing has to part with its very life's blood." I know that in the pride and the wisdom of this world that again is bitterly denounced. I am told in this very day this way of salvation by atonement, by substitution of a sinless one for sinful you and me, is a gory thing—that it is a ghastly thing—that it is a religion of the shambles. God help men who can talk in such a way of heaven's best device for saving sinful men—heaven's only device, heaven's best, heaven's last, heaven's utmost of mind and heart to save sinful, guilty, damned you and me from the impending doom. Ah, it flashed on him surely, "For me, for me." And that is the Gospel. "He loved me, and gave Himself for me, for me." He gave Himself a ransom for men—for me, I trust, among the rest. Not with blood of bulls, and goats, and heifers, and lambs, and rams, but by the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot—by *that* we are saved. "He bare our sins in His own body on the tree." "By His stripes we are healed." Bless God for this substitutionary salvation.

Then this salvation on that night in Egypt, and this night for you and me, was not only substitutionary, but another very simple idea I would like to revive in your hearts and minds, and it is this: it was after all a matter of simple obedience. "Take the blood." It was not enough that it was sprinkled by every Israelitish father or head of a household who represented them all. Every Israelitish father had to take that bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood, and strike it on the lintel and pass in, he and his household, just as he was told. And there is an element, therefore, in



salvation that is illustrated there. What is faith? In one great essential aspect of it—and I grant that it is a many-sided thing, and that the atonement may have many sides, but the human side is very crisp and sharp and clear, and this thing called faith in one great essential aspect of it is—what? It is a simple literal bowing of the soul in abject obedience. That is why you are so long in coming to it. What does faith mean? It is bowing and bending, and saying in the depth of your heart, “Yes, amen.” Have you said that? You are not saved until you have. You and I and every soul of us standing before the Cross of Christ and the Passover Lamb who hangs thereon, must say, “For me—yes,” with our whole heart bowing in the simplicity of the meek obedience of faith. And, again, it comes out, contrariwise, that the very essence of unbelief now is—and the great day will bring that out in the gleaming lightnings that fly round about the judgment-seat—the essence of unbelief is not a want of understanding, but a want of obedience. There is a moral taint in unbelief. I say bluntly that I believe that, at bottom, unbelief, intellectually, is a stupidity, and, morally, is a crime. It comes not from the bigness of intellect, but from an intellect warped and twisted and stunted and biassed from the very beginning.

Oh, for the obedience of faith, my brethren! If you are not a believer, I know that I may be rude and boisterous, and I may be setting you against me. Well, forgive me! I do not mean that; but I do want to do my best to bring down your soul—to bring down heady and high-minded thoughts to the obedience of Christ. Oh, that we may be brought down to simple faith and child-like trust! There is no salvation otherwise. Simply obey. Look at the scene, for, oh, how near it brings us to the Gospel. As Paul says in that text which is my context, “Christ our passover is slain for us.” Look! Do you see that Israelitish father catching the blood in the basin,

and dipping the hyssop, and striking the lintel? Now, come away to another evening away down the stream of time for centuries; and again it is becoming dark, and there is a darkness deeper than the darkness of the darkening sky. The darkness and blackness of sin and of all time are gathering round about that hill called Calvary. Now, watch that Saviour Christ. See that innocent holy man, holy as a lamb, without blemish and without spot. See Him hang there upon the Cross. Mark the Roman soldier as he thrusts that spear into His side, and out there come blood and water. And, remember this: there is the last blood that shall ever be shed for human sins. The red stream that did not even begin here, though I may say, in a sense it did begin here—this red stream of blood shed for the remission of sin flowed and flowed and flowed, for without shedding of blood there was no remission, but there is *the last blood that shall ever be shed for human sin*, and God help you if you reject that. “There remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation that shall devour the adversaries.” That is how God’s Word puts it, standing beside Christ on the Cross. Ah, unbelief gets its right name there—“the adversaries.” That is what I tried to say a little while ago. Faith—for we will have you come to it—faith is lacking not for want of understanding; it is because of a proud, unsubdued, imperious will that will not bend to the simplicity of faith in Christ; and those that will not bend must be broken, and they shall be. “Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall it shall grind him to powder.”

The bunch of hyssop had its meaning. What was that bunch of hyssop? It certainly played no small part in the deliverance of an Israelite and of his family that evening. “Take,” said God—ah, I like that—“take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood.” I can imagine, for

example, an Israelitish father, whose mind and heart are really moved by the occasion ; when the blood of that lamb was shed and caught in the basin, saying to himself—and it would have been no bad sign of his intellect or his heart : “ Now, I have come to the crisis of this crisis. What if I should go wrong here? What a great pity it is that Moses had no word from the Lord’s mouth as to how this red mark is actually to be hung out.” He need have been in no such puzzle, no such dilemma. Moses had a word right out of God’s mouth for that very crisis of the crisis—“ Take you a bunch of hyssop, and strike the lintel and the two side posts.” God actually condescending to tell a man how to sprinkle the blood ! Have you thought of it ? He left no loop-hole by which a man might be lost if he wanted to be saved himself, and to save his wife and his children. Salvation is the same yet. I tell you, my friend, that if in the great day any soul from this audience is found on the wrong side of things as regards Christ who sits on the judgment-seat, you will be standing there in absolute silence ; or if you speak, you will be calling wildly on the rocks and the mountains to hide you. And you will be crushed by the awful silence.

If lost, you will be inexcusable. So shall I. The man here to-day in this church the farthest from grace and the farthest from evangelical faith, is bound to say with me that, after such a scheme or plan of salvation, if any Israelite was lost, it was entirely his own blame. God did what God could. He made it so plain that the wayfaring man, though a fool, could not err therein. So now, the bunch of hyssop represents to me that personal act of yielding obedient faith by which I claim my share in the atoning, redemptive work. What was the hyssop ? Well, so far as I can gather from Scripture, it was a very common plant. You remember that when the range of Solomon’s botanical knowledge is being indicated, it is said that Solomon spoke of trees from the hyssop that grows out of

the wall to the cedar that is in Lebanon. What a poor salvation if God had said, "Take a sprig of cedar." What an easy salvation it was when He said, "Take a bunch of hyssop"—that kind of coarse grass, I suppose, that would grow out of any dyke back—just like the grass that grew out of the thatch of your mother's house away in the country long ago—a thing so simple; do you not see that everybody could get at it? Instinctively the father's hand went for it, and used it. I believe it was as common as the bunch of heather in your mother's kitchen; and used, maybe, for the same purposes. Where am I now? There is a something in the powers of your soul and mine that is common and handy, and is continually in use in this work-a-day life of ours. It is continually in use like the bunch of hyssop. And what is that? It is faith. What a howling Bedlam of a world this would be—and it is bad enough—if we suddenly woke up to-morrow and had no faith. Suppose that you discovered that you had no faith in your wife, and that she had none in you; and you went down to business and discovered that you could not trust your partner round the corner, and discovered that he could not trust you. I say what a Bedlam, what a hell of a world this would be, if there were no faith. Believe me, faith is as common as the hyssop that sprang out of the wall. With all the rack and ruin that sin has made it is here. Now, what you have to do is this.

Take that faith, that confidence that you are exercising in brother man and sister woman every day—it is the very cement of society—society would tumble into chaos without it—take that faith of yours *and give it a new direction*. Give it an operation, which it never had before. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and thou shalt be saved." Trust for yourself His precious blood. Put out thy own hand and take in thy own share of His atoning work for thyself. See to that,—I do not care how young you be; you have lived too long, if this thing has yet to be

done—see that it is done where you sit, and as you sit. Take this faith of thine, and exercise it towards the atoning Saviour dying on the Cross to blot out thy sin, and introduce thee to God's favour, which is life, and to His lovingkindness, which is better than life. Is it done? Here is the crisis of this meeting. Here it is, old man, aged woman, men and women in midlife, and you who are just in life's morning march. With one hand I lift up before you the slain Lamb; and oh, that God, with overmastering grasp, by means of the other hand would plant you before the Cross and let you see the situation. Saved, are you? How? How? Where? Only by personal trust in Him who there is dying, the Lamb of God. Oh, let us see to it. I wish I had the tongue of men and of angels to put it as it ought to be put; but if I am not putting it aright, see to it, my brothers, my sisters, that you do the thing. See that it is done. *Whether you are quite sure about it or not*, the best way is to take the bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood, and strike it on lintel and the two side posts. Act thy part. Trust thou.

Of course I can imagine some—shall I say hyper or overstrict Calvinist—and I am throwing no stones at Calvinists, because virtually that is my own scheme of doctrine—but you are wanting to say to me, “Now, preacher, take care. Is that not, after all, to preach that men may save themselves? And do you say that they are to exercise this common faith that is exercised in the sphere and region of sublunary things—simply to exercise that trust in Jesus Christ?” Ah, my dear friends, I am not forgetting that *it is all of grace*. “By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” I know that the roots of this simple faith of ours, if you go back to them, are found far beyond ourselves. Simple and human and natural as it is, its roots are Divine. It is the same with the hyssop. Will you explain to me the bunch of hyssop? Come, now, and tell me its beginning



and end, its top and bottom. The poet says, "Little flower in the crannied wall, if I could tell what thou art, and all in all, flower in the crannies, I would know what God and man is." So with faith. Here on this plane and region of natural things it is natural; but go away down to the roots of things, and you come to the Scripture statement, "not of works,"—all of grace—"it is the gift of God." Lift your hand of faith, and give it a stretch that it never had before. The very difficulty will prove to you that it is a new and unwonted reach—the reach of mind and heart and will. It seems to be beyond you as you rise to it; but God the Holy Ghost will rise in you and with you, and your hand shall be laid on the head of the Lamb of God. Oh, do it! Yield now. Faith is not irrational. Faith is common, natural, reasonable, sublime. You put it to its highest power, its loftiest use, when it is turned to trust God in the word that He has spoken, and in the love that He has displayed on Calvary.

And the last word I have to say is this—the last word in the text. "Take the bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood, *and let none of you go out of the door of his house until the morning.*" I hear to-day, and so do you, about "development" and "growth;" and what we hear about them gets wearisome, does it not? There was very little development that night. "Let none of you go out of the door of his house until the morning." Go in, and stay in, if you would be saved. That is to say, there was to be no advance and absolutely no development *from the simplicity of faith*. That which they had begun to do saved them only as they kept it up. Human nature is the same all the world over, whether you are in Egypt or in London; and I can imagine a young Israelite, a young fellow just like ourselves, full of flesh and blood, full of natural go and glow and enthusiasm, feeling it a little irksome as the evening wore on, and as the night darkened down; and feeling that it was rather an ignoble, inglorious position to be huddled in there like



sheep, with that word over them, "Let none of you go out of the door of his house until the morning." And to be saved in this simple way by the blood-red mark which they did not see, but which, being outside, could be seen by the destroying angel as he passed. And I should not wonder, as the Israelites and the Egyptians were not separated one from another, if the Egyptians were all round about the Israelites; and I should not wonder if some young Egyptians came round about these blood-streaked houses and cried, with scoffs and jokes, "Come out! Come out!" and laughed and said, "What are you doing in there? There is no judgment. There was never such a fine night in Egypt. Come out! Come out!" Was not that hard to bear? Is not that taunt in our ears yet—"Come out, you stupid believers!" And it is ill to bear. It does look as if we had done a stupid thing. It does look as if we had just taken our intellect and trampled it under our feet in order to be Christians. We did not. We crucified not our intellect, but the pride of the intellect, which is a different thing, a thing of the devil, which will bring us to the doom of the devil. And I can imagine a young Israelite chafing and getting restless as the night wore on, and there came no sign of this doom, and no sign of this judgment; I can imagine him shaking himself, and saying, "I will assert my manhood. This may do for the old people;" and he is going over to the door, but his father rises, and with a voice like thunder says, "Unhand that door! Back for your life!" And he was right if he did. He was right. The Egyptians might laugh that night, and young, restless, hot-headed Israelites might have a little trouble, but *nobody laughed in the morning*. And you and I, children of faith, believers in God and in God's Christ who died for sin, just for a little while have to stand the laugh, and I admit that it is against our pride. By the grace of God, and in the obedience of faith, let me charge you, hold on, my brother, as you

began. Let us keep together, we who belong to "the household of faith." How that expression receives its illustration from this story. Let us keep together. Let us encourage ourselves to stay indoors until the morning. Some of you, God bless you, will not have long to wait. God bless all white and whitening heads in this assembly; you will not have long to wait. "Now is the time of your salvation nearer than when you believed." For you the morning cometh. Soon it shall break upon you, and you shall prove, even as down here you cannot, that you builded better than you knew when in simple faith you crucified all rationalism in your soul, all questioning, all pride, and simply believed in God and in the Son of God for salvation, for time, and for eternity. And for none of us will it be very long. Bless God, at the longest the time in which we have to wait here, prisoners of hope in the household of faith, is not long. Let me say again to any who are hesitating and halting, oh, my brethren, young or old, my sister, rich or poor, pass in—come in. The household of faith, the company of evangelical believers, is not the narrow, cribbed, cabined, confined place that you suppose it to be. Let every man speak his own experience, and I will speak mine, and say that since I came to simplicity of faith in Jesus Christ I have not found any legitimate ambition of mind or heart to be denied. I have only found that I am safely shut in to all that is worth having, and shut out from all which, were I to get, would be the ruin of heart and life both here and hereafter. May God bless His own Word. Amen.

# Regent Square Pulpit.

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## THE GREAT REFUSAL.

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### A Sermon

DELIVERED IN REGENT SQUARE CHURCH,  
ON JANUARY 22ND, 1890, BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

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A BROTHER prayed that this night might be “a night of decision,” which led me to read you the chapter we have had before us as our lesson, and leads me now to preach from this familiar portion of God’s Word. Although this man decided in the wrong way, may the Lord give us grace to go right where he went wrong.

“And when Jesus was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to Him, and asked Him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou Me good? There is none good but one, *that is* God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto Him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth [and as you have it in another Gospel, What lack I yet?]. Then Jesus beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow Me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.”—MARK X. 17-22.

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“The rich young ruler.” But I trust that the very title of my subject may not stumble any of us, and make us listen with languid interest, simply because we are neither rich, nor prominent, nor influential. You see here the difficulty of suddenly deciding for Christ. The difficulty, so to speak, of stopping on your step and deciding at once ; having no time to consult anybody, nor to say to yourself even, “What will be the outcome of this? If I become a follower of Jesus, what will become of all ‘present things’ with which I am engaged?” Now, this is best illustrated over the head of the rich, the wealthy man. But it is really a difficulty for rich and poor alike. It is the great difficulty because of the worldiness that is in all our hearts. Whether we are rich or poor, we are all alike here. We are all marked by this: the love of the world. A cleaving to the world, whether it is the rich man’s world, the middle-class man’s world, or the poor man’s world. We cling to it. It gets the first claim; Christ the second. Poor people will admit that as well as rich people. We don’t naturally, any of us, go to Christ first. We look first after the things of the world.

This fact receives its most vivid illustration, I say, in the case of the rich man. For his world, on many accounts, is desirable and absorbing; and it is all the more difficult for him to give it up. But we are all prone to hold to the things of this world first, and look after Christ and eternity second, if at all. That is what this man did. I say this, then, to bring the subject near to all of us; rich and poor,

old and young, well-off or ill-off. Now, how does it present itself in the narrative?

“When Jesus was gone forth into the way, there came one running to Him.” A rich young ruler. A gentleman; a man of high social position; a man of high office in Church and State. This Teacher and Preacher called Jesus was going about the land; and, when passing through this part, this rich young ruler saw Him, and did what you, perhaps, would not dare to do. He put aside shame and fear, and all that feeling of “Oh, what will people think if they see *me* running to this new Teacher, who says He is the Messiah?” The rich young ruler kneeled down in the public road before Jesus, and put his question about eternal life. Now, might not that encourage some of you to be a little more open and outward with your spiritual anxiety than you have yet been? My dear friend, don’t hang back and say, “If I show that I am anxious, what will people say?” There was the rich young ruler who showed openly that he was anxious, and he was a gentleman, and some of you dearly love a gentleman. Your great question about the meetings at Regent Square is, What class of people are going? Are there any of the upper ten looking in? Yes! Some of them. And they are getting their superiority taken out of them!

Now banish all that. This wonderful Saviour of ours in His sojourn here, in the days of His humiliation, and ever since too, in the days of His resurrection, has bestowed His salvation upon all sorts of people. I will get you some of

the very best families in the West End, where the Son of God has His disciples. Some among them have left "the world." They have braved the world's shame, braved the world's scorn. And the West End world can be terribly scornful to a Christian who stands up in the midst of its pride and wealth, and is out and out for Christ.

The young ruler braved it so far; and these that I have referred to they have braved it, braved it as the ruler, alas, did not. They have fallen at Christ's feet, and have shouldered the cross, and are bearing Christ's reproach. So be encouraged, my hearer.

It was a pity this young ruler went wrong at the *end*. He did well at first. You start well then. Don't say, "What will people say, if I am anxious and become a Christian?" Here is one, a tip-top gentleman, bowing before Christ by the way-side. May his number be increased! Don't you hang back. This young man never did a finer thing than that, when he ran and fell down at Christ's feet. The pity was that he got up *and walked away*.

And when he came to Christ, what happened? He said, "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" That is to say, he let out and let up to Christ the greatest anxiety that can pass through the human heart. He spoke for us all when he said, "Tell me, Master, what is 'eternal life?' Tell me how I am to get it. Master, I am a Jew, a church-going Jew. I obey the whole law of Moses. But, oh, Teacher, I am painfully conscious that, with all my church-going, all my good deeds and respectability, I am



conscious that I have not got the great thing, the thing I want, 'eternal life.' Oh, Master, what is it? *I am conscious of it by the absence of it.* There is, I feel, *a something* that I have not got, and that something is everything, 'eternal life.' I go through all the forms of worship; but the 'eternal life,' that which the coffin and the grave can't affect or touch, I know I have not got *that*."

Now, that is your condition, isn't it? I will go bail for it that every one of us here is wanting eternal life. I speak to some of you, and you say, "Oh, yes! I want the right thing, the real heart of the nut. If I do want to have anything to do with religion, I want to have its essence. I don't want to be a mere church-goer, to just wear the clothes of religion, but I want life, power, reality." Quite so. So do we all. And this young ruler spoke for us all when he said "eternal life." There is a great big void and emptiness in me, and I feel that, eternal life, whatever it is, alone will fill the gap. If I went round this church to every soul and said, "Do you not want eternal life in the Bible sense; that sense of pardon, that peace, that power, that felicity, which, beginning here, grows to all eternity—don't you want it?" Every soul would say, "Yes; I want eternal life." Well, why haven't you got it? For the gift of God is eternal life.

Then Christ did a strange thing when the young ruler came to Him and put his question. The ruler said "Good Master," and Christ caught him short on the word "Good," and instead of letting the phrase go by, Christ fastened

on it, and said, "Why do you call Me good? There is none good but one, that is God." Wasn't that strange?—instead of answering his question, especially when such a desirable man for Christ's struggling, infant cause had come so near. You would think that Christ would have done the best He could to land that fish in His net. But no, He seemed almost to scare him away. Ah, our Lord knew what was in that man: He knew that man's danger, and He dared to run the risk of stumbling him a bit that He might be honest with him. It would help, not hinder him. This man's danger, I think, was that he should come to Christ in a patronizing way. This young ruler, perhaps, came to Him and was virtually saying, "Here is a question that I have asked of the other teachers, what have you to say about it? What is eternal life?" There was a little bit of danger that he would come to this new Teacher to patronize Him, and say by his tone, or almost unconsciously, even when bowed down before Him, "Understand who it is that is bowing before you. You don't often get such a man as I am to acknowledge you as a Master." It was a common thing to come to different religious teachers and give them flattering titles and names.

They were swearing by different Rabbis and teachers of the law. Now, Christ knew this, and in effect said to the young ruler, "Don't come to Me with flattering titles; don't mistake Me for a Rabbi. I have no ambition that way. Come to Me, and put a plain, honest question, and I will give you a plain answer; but no flattery, no patronage."

For I do think that even when he bowed, there was a *self-consciousness* about the performance.

Now, men and women, if you could see that point, it would be salvation to some of you to-night. Come not to me, but to my Master, with the naked need of your naked soul, for eternal life. Ask Him plainly, and take His answer, and that is the end. But don't for any sake delude yourselves into thinking that you can patronize Christ, or patronize His Church or His servants.

The Lord of Glory, wouldst thou make Him rich? Wouldst thou come and flatter Christ by heaping upon Him empty titles? Many of us are doing it indirectly every day.

Christ gave that young man a little bit of a shake, in kindness, to drive all that nonsense out of him, and said, as it were, "I am no Rabbi; put your question honestly; but no flattery, no titles, no mouth honour, only real earnestness.

My friend, what did you come for to-night? What did you come for, if you didn't come to get eternal life? If you have only come to see, to look on, to hear, to patronize this new preacher who has just come to London, saying, "I should like to encourage the man;" if this be all, please take up your hat and leave.

Come to Christ, come to His Church, come to His servants to get your soul saved, and your hard question answered. "Eternal life. How can I get it?" Come with that question, and we will try to answer that, and send you away rejoicing. But you can't patronize us, you can't patronize our Master. You can't look down upon a man

whose head is in heaven ; you're a fool for trying. You can only lie down at His feet, and say, " Lord, I am nothing ! " though you had millions of money. Remember, it was all the Lord's before it was yours. You can only lie at the Lord's feet. " Lord save me, if I am to be anything for time or eternity. Lord, if I am saved, it must be through Thy grace ; Thy grace alone." How near the rich young ruler came to Christ, and how far he stayed away.

Well, Christ asked him another thing. He said to him after giving him that little shake, to make him real and thorough in his desire for eternal life, and to deliver him from the delusions and dangers of his time ; He said, " You know the commandments." And our Lord ran over the commandments. " What about these ? " And He received the disappointingly glib answer, " Master, all these have I kept from my youth. What lack I yet ? If that is the road to eternal life, why haven't I got it ? For I have never been an adulterer. I have never been this, or that, or the other that I ought not to be. Outwardly my life is all right. Go to my fellow-members of the Sanhedrim, and they will speak a good word for me. Go and ask my father and my mother, and they will tell you that I was always a good lad."

" All these have I kept from my youth." Now, he *was* a good fellow, where some of us are bad ; notwithstanding his wealth, and the opportunity that wealth brings with it to let a man take his fling, whether in old Jerusalem, or modern London. But this young rich man hadn't taken his fling ;

he had denied himself to the lusts of the flesh and to much ungodliness, and had lived soberly, virtuously, and creditably. But this, all this, "*does not reach up to eternal life.*" No, that's not the road. And once for all Christ had to shut this door; Christ virtually said: "You are a doer, are you? You try to reach eternal blessedness by what you think you can be, and what you think you can do, in the way of your own goodness. Now, my friend, since that is your case, I will try you. I will give you one thing to do; and if you do that, you set up the topstone on all your other doing, you will be perfect." He might have said, "You will be as good as Adam was before he fell. You will be the rarest specimen that has ever appeared since Adam's day." Aye; He might have said, "If you can do this, *you will be as good as Myself*, and you will make My mission here a great mistake." For why was God's own Son here on earth? Why was He manifest in the flesh? But just because there was no true goodness, because there was no true righteousness in the earth. Therefore He came to work it out, and offer it to us as a free gift; a righteousness that would stand the scrutiny of the judgment day. "Go thy way; sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross and follow Me. Do this, young man, and you will be perfect."

But the young man didn't. He couldn't. We see that this young man broke both tables of the law into smash by one act. What is the law—God's law? The Ten Commandments are all fulfilled in this word, "Thou shalt

love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself."

This young man showed that he neither loved the Lord his God with all his heart, nor did he love his neighbour as himself. He was not nearly so good as he thought he was. His pretensions are pulverized.

Now, when will we all learn the lesson: that that door is shut? There is no road to heaven this way; it is swept, as one has said, by the whole battery of God's law.

I don't say that this young man was one of your hypocrites. I am quite willing to believe that he was a good, upright, amiable man. But, then, that isn't good enough; that's the point. The best specimen of human goodness since Adam's day he may have been; but when he met Christ, he met his judgment day before the time, and he went under.

Now, dear souls, let us get rid of all hope of getting eternal life by our own goodness.

This man was tested down to the ground, and found to be wanting in goodness that would stand the test of the law, when the law's pressure—its full, fair, and square pressure—was laid upon him; and in testing the young man thus, the Lord was not harsh. No, the Lord was merciful. The Lord wanted to allure him. I think His tone would be very winsome. It was as though He said, "You have a benevolent disposition, and to you this won't be harsh—to sell all that you have, and give to the poor." And then Christ would become still more encouraging. "Thou shalt



have treasure in heaven"—where Abraham's, where David's treasure was. "You won't really lose by it. Then come, fall in behind here, with these fishermen from Galilee; make common cause with us; take up the cross, and follow Me." No, no; the Lord didn't want to drive him off; He wanted to hold him. But wasn't that a test? Didn't that stop his glib utterance, "All these have I kept from my youth." This was the young fellow who would stand up in the Synagogue every Sabbath day and sing our very Psalms. He was so blinded, poor cheap got-up soul, by his own righteousness, by a mere form of religion that had so little power, that he could sing the 51st Psalm and go out of the Synagogue and meet the Incarnate Son of God and say, "All these have I kept from my youth." You remember that 51st Psalm:—

"Behold I in iniquity  
Was formed the womb within;  
My mother also me conceived,  
In guiltiness and sin."

From the deadening power of mere formality in religion may God deliver us where we sit.

Christ tested the young man, and he fell. No road to heaven that way. "Well, preacher," some of you may say, "it was hard to ask a fellow, there, on the spot, on the roadside, to stop and give up everything, and make common cause with the despised Nazarene." Yes, it does seem so to us; but this is eternal life; and we say, like him, that that is our quest. Every young fellow is a rich young ruler

in his own opinion; and what a world he has before him ! But he must give it up. He must let it go; he must become dead to the world and alive to Jesus Christ *if he would have eternal life*. Let me repeat that again, and again, for you said you wanted eternal life. Now, are you ready to pay the price? Face to face with Christ, say, "Christ for me. Lord, I give up all for Thee." And then what will you find? What the rich man would have found out if he had only waited. That when you give up for Christ your all, you get all. You don't give up, but get. If he had given up his all to Christ, as Abraham gave up his Isaac—his very life—to God, he would, as in that case, have received all back again. God beggars no man. The prizes are all in his direction; only they haven't the gilt and tinsel that catch the eye. Poor rich man ! He might have become the Apostle Paul, and he flung it away ! He remained a mere anonymous landed proprietor !

He clung to the world, he clung to his property, and he let the Son of God go. He grabbed at the world and lost it. This will be the case with every one who does the same thing. For you cannot keep the world. Sooner or later death comes, as death would come to the ruler, and he and the world be separated for ever. Death would rudely dispossess him of all his earthly substance, of all his possessions. Death would cut him off from the land of the living, and usher him into eternity. And the first sight that would meet his eyes in eternity would be "that Man" whom he had rejected on the roadside in Galilee !

Refuse Christ to-night, and you will meet Him to-morrow. There is no getting rid of the Son of God.

Take care, young man, young woman. Instantaneously let go everything, your poverty or your wealth, your world, whatever it is, and close with Christ.

"He went away grieved." But it didn't matter whether he was grieved or not, *he went away*, and there is no hint that he ever came back. If the world was too strong for him, there, at the Master's feet, I am afraid it would only get stronger the further he moved away. Now, don't say: "McNeill, be generous. I can't decide for Christ to-night. You have sprung upon me so suddenly, and it's hard to give up the world, with all its charms, the world which has so twined itself about me. But, preacher, if I don't decide to take Christ to-night, I am going away in a very hopeful state. Preacher, I am deeply impressed; I will think about the matter." Yes; but you are going away. "He went away," that is hell begun.

Do you feel it hard to give up the world, and decide instantaneously? If you do, tell Christ it is hard. Say anything to Him, but *don't go away*. Say to Him, "Lord, it is hard. The world has twined around me. Lord, its cares, like a millstone, hang around me. Its pleasures, like a silken cord, entwine me." Tell Christ that, and He will cut the cord. Indeed, tell Him it is utterly beyond your own strength. That is what He waits to hear.

This Gospel is an awful Gospel on this side, where it comes into collision with the world. So it is. You have to

die in order that you may live; you have to die to the world's pleasures; you have to die to the world's fear and to the world's frown.

Will you do what the rich young man did not do? He went away. Don't do that. Lie down at His feet. Take Him, accept Him now. He is the true God; to know Him is life eternal. Don't give yourself time, but fling yourself forward, just as you are, into His arms. That was what Peter did; and he was no such *gentleman*, in a society sense, as this rich young man. But he was the true gentleman. He loved Christ; and for the sake of Christ, one bonny day, he rose up and left the world, his fisherman's world, his nets, his boat, his all. "Lo, we have left all, and followed Thee." He followed Him on earth, and he is with Christ now in glory. Yes, Peter is with Him still. Do you think he lost by giving up the world and taking Christ?

Come to Christ now. Kneel down at His feet, and remember, that since the "rich young ruler" kneeled at those feet, there has come the print of the nail upon them. May this help you to know Him better than the ruler did, or could. Say to Him, "Thou, O Christ, wast sacrificed for me. Thou didst bear the world's shame and scorn and spitting, and shall I fear to bear it with Thee? Shall I turn my back on Thee, for any tinsel of this perishing world? Never, never! Christ for me, Christ for me."

I can preach no more. If I talked till midnight, I could but say, "Christ for me, Christ for thee."

Let me put the whole scene in a closing sentence.

Jesus was going along the road one day. A rich young ruler saw Him, ran in before Him, kneeled down, and questioned Him about eternal life. His question was answered. He rose up, and walked away. In five minutes all was over, and no ripple left on the surface of the stream to tell where a human soul took the sullen plunge into the icy waters of worldliness—of rejection of the Son of God. That same scene is being re-enacted now. God help thee, my hearer, to act thy part better than this “poor player” did. Fall to Christ where he fell away from Him. He that hath the Son of God hath life, and he only.







# Regent Square Pulpit.

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A FEW REMARKS PREVIOUS TO TAKING THE  
HOSPITAL SUNDAY COLLECTION.

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## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE CHURCH,  
ON SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 8TH, 1890, BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

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MARK xii. 41-44.

THIS Sabbath is known among us as "Hospital Sunday," and so it is natural for me to-day to bring before your minds the subject of giving; to bring it before you so that it may be set in the light of the Lord, and in the light of the teaching of His Word. It is a subject, as you know, much controverted—of so much controversy, indeed, that, naturally, I should greatly prefer being excused from making any public utterance about it. Still, we must not shun to declare the whole counsel of God; and my desire and prayer is that the Master Himself, and His own teaching, may hold the balances even and equally. Then I shall be able to speak His truth as if He Himself spoke it; and you shall be able to listen, remembering that the word is not mine, but God's.

"Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much." I like greatly to notice the context of

this familiar story. The setting of it is this : Our Lord had just made His final rupture with the religious leaders of His country and His time. He had burned and blazed against them unmistakably. Indeed, His soul had so rushed out in wrathful speech, that modern critics say He has put Himself on the common level of a very righteously indignant man—but *a man*, with a man's faults and infirmities, when he allows the heat of passion to carry him away. They find in His denunciation the infirmity of temper that attaches itself so easily and readily to us, and turns our indignation into indiscriminate abuse. *We* do not think so. We believe that our Lord of set purpose trod all our ways ; that in them all He was at once perfect man and very God ; and that, when He burned and blazed against the Pharisees, it was without speck or stain of fault or sin.

But it was terrible speech. I do not misunderstand our Lord there. I think the Son of God, in certain aspects, looks at His best. Even good *men* do not always necessarily disfigure themselves by bursts of anger. Indeed, it is something grand to see a good man in a white heat of honest, righteous indignation ; and if that be so with us, how much more must it be the case with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy One. But it was, I say, an awful storm of righteous wrath and indignation. "The whole hierarchy," says one, "from the high priest its primate, to the Levite its curate, and the Rabbi its university professor or tutor, had been denounced before the people, in language which they must resent if they were to retain any authority at all." He took the whole political, social, and religious system, and unmistakably gave it its Judgment Day before the time. Then He seems to have retired, partly, perhaps, to allow His human agitation to subside. He

went back and sat down in the part of the Temple called the "Court of the Women," one of the principal features of which was that the collecting-boxes, as we might say, were placed along one side. Thirteen large chests called "Shopheroth," because of their trumpet-shaped openings, were there; and the people thronged through the Court of the Women, passing up thence by fourteen steps into the Court of the Men, then on into the Holy Place itself. Our Lord sat down in that outer vestibule, over against "the plates," to rest Himself, to seek relief from His burden, and then and there this incident happened.

His hot heart—if I may speak so of Him without suggesting anything of human stain—His hot heart grew calm and quiet, and still, as He looked on this widow casting in her two mites; and He called upon His disciples to come and see this fair and lovely flower in the desert. "I will open rivers in dry places," says an old promise, which was now fulfilled.

Yes, I like the setting of it; for here is what it suggests to me. There He sat down to rest, and recover, and refresh Himself; *but nothing save Omniscience*, I do believe, would have steadied Him and kept Him right just there. If I—if you will allow me to put it this way—if I had delivered such a scorching denunciation as He had just delivered, and then had gone and sat down in the Court of the Temple, where the rich worshippers were thronging and "casting" their gifts, almost certainly my sermon, so to say, would have come back upon me. You are not preachers, therefore you cannot quite understand how a preacher's sermon does come back upon him, especially if it has been strong, and searching, and severe. It is apt to come back; a voice within him says, "You were only scolding; you

were only indulging in carnal anger and abuse; look at those people, those decent, respectable, wealthy people; see how they are giving." For "the rich"—the narrative is honestly careful to say—"the rich cast in much." "And these, and such as these," the voice would say, "are the very people you have been daring to denounce with the utmost of speech, and tone, and gesture."

I think if He had been less than the Omniscient Being He was, he would have been inclined to repent a little, if not to apologize. Now, of course, I must take care; I do not say we are all and always justified in our severe speeches, and that we should fall back on the Master and say we are as He was. Perhaps we may only be indulging in human passion; perhaps we may overstep fair and wise bounds. But certainly He never did; and I like to think of Him sitting there, after His tremendous sermon, seeing the rich casting in their gifts, and yet *never drawing back a syllable He had uttered*. He never allowed this to make Him rise and take so much discount off His speech, because of ready money paid down. He allowed it to stand; He let it all stand. But I hold to this again: I believe it was only Omniscience that kept Him still.

Here were loads of money being poured into the treasury, and it did look as if something were called for in the way of redressing and readjusting the over-emphasis and ill-balance of what He had been saying as to the condition, the spiritual condition, of His time. But there He sat, and said nothing. This does not in the slightest avail to remedy or mitigate those evils which called forth His ire. Now, one or two points further. "Many that were rich cast in much." First of all, as there were then, so there are now—the genus is not extinct, although sometimes when you

begin to inquire for them you only hear of them by their absence—there were then *rich men who went to Church*, and there are still—it is in the text. When you begin to inquire about rich men, it often looks as if the rich people used to be, but are not now, in the particular quarter where the inquiry is being made, and the money is needed. Please don't run too easily over it: this story, remember, mentions rich men; many rich men; many rich men in Israel; many rich men in Israel who went to Church; many rich men in Israel who went to Church, and gave, and who gave much.

I want to deal fairly. Christ and Christ's Word deal fairly by the subject, as it is given to us in the narrative. See how honestly the Bible spaces the thing out, see how beautifully the Bible observes the true perspective; it sets the thing in the proper order and proportion, and it notices and acknowledges, without a single word of drawback, that the rich, and many of the rich, were casting in *much*. How one could almost wish those times were back again! We have in Israel, as they had then, wealthy people—the devil has not got all the rich people; by no means. We, in Christ's Church, in all the powerful denominations, and even in those that are considered small as compared with others, we all have our wealthy men. The longer I live, the more I find that out. Presbyterians, Episcopalians—I like to put things in their proper order—and all the others, we are not so poor as the cry that is often in the air would lead one to believe. God always secures it for Himself, that He has in Israel a sufficiency of wealth, if He could only get it back. They were there then; they are here now. It gives foundation on which to stand, when a preacher has to say some sharp things, and when a preacher has to make some plain

appeals. Let me say it frankly, but in God's name, we are not to be checked, and we are not to be muzzled, and our appeals are not to be throttled by the cry, "Oh, yes! but there are no rich men here." Do not say that; it is not the case—there *are*. And, anyway, rich and poor are comparative terms. I am rich to-day, compared with what I was, say, twelve years ago. I frankly admit it, to lead you to make the same admission. Some of us here have got on marvellously; we are rich, and increased with goods, as compared with what we used to be. And the Lord claims His share of the increase ever since it set in. God's Word is far more just and fair in its sizing-up and description of the relative positions of men, in regard to money, than any word of ours can possibly be. It neither minimizes nor overstates. It looks level at facts as they are, and talks about rich people in a real true meaning of that term, which will stand any test you may like to apply.

"Many that were rich cast in much," for they had it. And they did cast in much. The Word says so. It was a noisy place. You could hardly have stopped to gossip or to say a word to a neighbour, for your ears heard nothing but the perpetual musical clink and jingle of *much* as it went shovelling down those scoops and rattled into the bottom of the chest. I would like to have been there, and I would like to have seen it. I do honestly confess that when I see a big crowd of people gathered together for religious purposes, I think of the collection. I was present at the magnificent demonstration against Compensation in Hyde Park yesterday afternoon, because I believed it to be a religious one. But the one thing I felt we came short in was, that there was no collection. So many thousands, hundreds of thousands, gathering and scattering—and no



collection! I felt we might be justly charged with being mere windy demagogues or agitators—"clerical and lay," as I suppose we shall be described—and nothing more, because the occasion was not sanctified by a good thorough-going Presbyterian collection. But this by the way.

"Many that were rich cast in much." But there is a drawback to be taken here. We cannot forget the state of the times then, and we cannot forget, nor close our eyes, to the condition of things to-day. Unfortunately then, and unfortunately still, this one place and point of time—the Sabbath, the Church, and the collection—was with many people the only place, and the only time in which, and at which, their liberality was displayed. It was done here for a show, and their giving was as graceless as their praying, about which Christ Himself spake unmistakably when He was describing it. They gave for a show—without grace, even—as they made long prayers in public places, also for a show, and to be seen of men.

The Lord took up a sample man of the time in the familiar parable of the Pharisee and the publican. That is no coarse daubing or exaggeration—that was a man simply lifted out from the pews, as it were; from the actual temple-going of the time; and nobody who heard the parable would call it an exaggeration. He was a sample. He was quite a hard, coarse, dry, unspiritual man, who knew nothing—not a syllable—of what the grace of God meant, but he stood and said, "I thank Thee, O God, that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I can get." A man, in other words, who shakes the big purse in your face! He knows it is the biggest item *on the positive side* of his superiority to the rest of mankind.

Is it not the same to-day? Have we not to stand here oftentimes, and if we would be faithful to God, and to the souls of moneyed men, have we not to rebuke ostentatious giving, to rebuke giving even when it is done largely and when it is done lavishly; must we not, at any rate, call attention to it from God's point of view? Ah! it is easy for some to let themselves out in this direction, and this direction only. Let not our moneyed friends misunderstand their position, but let them see it in God's light. If you have plenty of money, if you have room and scope and verge beyond your actual needs, you will surely admit that it is quite easy, without any great grace in your heart, to make the widow's heart to sing for joy. It costs you absolutely nothing. It is easy for you to make a big show in Church registers of collection—it costs you nothing. But, it must be estimated, as Ambrose put it long ago, not in the light of what is given, so much as in the light of what remains behind. We must say that, we must honestly say that, we must say all that, and not a syllable less than that. "Many that were rich cast in much," but there was this drawback—it was a time of grinding, it was a time of robbing the poor, a time of harshness, a time of oppression and injustice. Many were the rich men, who, like the Pharisee, would rob widows' houses, and grind the faces of the poor, and then seek to muzzle inconvenient criticism by giving ostentatiously and largely to the Temple, where it was seen, and known, and recorded. Just as we have men to-day, engaged in that traffic, which more, perhaps, than any other agency blights the body and soul of thousands and thousands, and fills the land with woe. Yet they come ostentatiously and give, say, fifty thousand pounds to endow a cathedral,

and expect that God's servants will be so impressed and so depressed by them and the greatness of their gift, that we shall not dare to criticize nor ask, "Is the money clean or unclean? How did you come by it?" Time was, and the Church was poor then, when to such givers, coming with ill-gotten wealth, and coming in such a tone and spirit, Christ's representatives would have said, "Thy money perish with thee." Go and pay the widow for her husband who was killed by your drink; go and feed and clothe the orphans whom you have made orphans by your utter selfishness. Don't say I am too severe. You cannot whitewash the drink traffic any more than you can perfume a dung-hill. It is of the devil, beyond any power to express; and the closer you come to it, and the more you see of its evil, the plainer this becomes. And then we are not to criticize, but we are to be so impressed with the many that are casting in much that we are to be muzzled, and say nothing. Ah, no! be fair; be as fair as you like, be as fair as Christ, and you will be as severe as Christ.

That was a time in which wealthy men let themselves out in this one direction, in order to preserve their good name, and character, and credit in the religious world; and the same thing is deep amongst us to-day. Let us watch—those of us who have a margin, and a large one, above what we need—let us watch; let us be careful. I would speak with all tenderness and all solicitude concerning those who have more than they need. As I said before, if a great pile of gold were laid upon your hand, I wonder if you would keep the palm open? I rather think that when it came down the hand would naturally shut on it. I think that lady spoke for many of us who, when she had just been left a legacy of some thousands of pounds, took up her pen, and

said, "Quick, quick! let me write off a cheque for a thousand before my heart grows hard." Oh! there are so many dangers; and the very Church ways of gathering in money just seem to be made to encourage the worser side of large gifts, and of large givers. The sheet is handed round, the statistics are published, the very names are given, and if you wanted to give that hundred pounds *to astonish the Browns*, rather than as a thankoffering to God, it is so easy to do it. The whole system is arranged to give a loose to our vanity.

Here is a matter, for example, which I know causes rankling across the Tweed. For I shall only speak what I do know. There is a fund in connection with a poor or working-class congregation; a fund into which should be poured the gifts of God's people for foreign missions, let us say. There is an extra wealthy man in the neighbourhood, who worships in that congregation, but instead of giving his contribution into the common fund, he sends it straight away to the head office, where it will be registered and published in his own name. He does not want the poor widow with her two mites to be credited with his hundred pounds, as she would be if all the contributions were thrown into one lump, and no name given. Well, of course, men can say they do that, "lest they might dry up the giving of poorer people;" for poor people can be as desperately mean as their neighbours. *Poor* people can quite well delight to have one or two rich men and women who give for them as well as for themselves. And they will praise them and applaud them, this downright selfish thing being at the bottom of it—that it saves them. I know that is perfectly true; but still a great deal of indignant talk goes on in connection with the very thing

I have mentioned. When we put God before us, and remember who we are and what we are, and who gives us power to get wealth, it will save us from much that was evil, even when many that were rich cast in much.

“And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And He called unto Him His disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.” It was when the poor widow came that Christ called His disciples. This to Him was a thing worth noticing; that other side was common, the jingling of wealth—He had seen through it all. He knew the whole worth, and estimation, and value of it, and he sat calm, and quiet, and still. He did not rise and break into ecstasy. He did not talk as Church treasurers are sometimes apt to talk at the Church annual meeting, because all the seats are let, and the totals generally are better than they were last year. Do not let us hear of these comparative statistics; and especially in well-to-do congregations. Read in the light of this story, they may be worth very little indeed. Take away your figures, and your comparisons of this year with last, take away your applauding of those who give the big sum; for heaven’s sake, let us be wise, and keep ourselves in, especially here, where the Word of God shines as clearly as the noon-day sun.

Christ called to Him His disciples; and here we see Him bringing out His eternal wisdom, and counsel, and judgment upon this matter where so many of us go wrong: “Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow has cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury:

for all they did cast in of their abundance ; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living." There is the thing complete. My poor friend, do not spoil your gift by putting in, say, half-a-crown, and saying, "Now, when I put in half-a-crown out of my wages I am putting in as much as that other man who is going to put in a five or a fifty pound note." *Never mind the other man.* Look to yourself, and to the Lord, who sees and knows all about the proportional element. He estimates all that ; keep right before Him.

In the case of the widow *there was nothing left*. You are not to look at me, and I am not to look at you, but each alone, each man and woman is to look upward before God, and remembering Him and His offering, let every soul give with the keen but kindly eyes of Christ reading us to our bottom thought. That is the thing. Sometimes one hears this expression, "I will give my mite." Will you? Well, we shall have a big collection to-day if you do. I advise the deacons to take the bag, and to take their hat in their hand along with it, for the bag will not suffice. There will be an overflow. How we often use these words with a kind of mock-modesty ! "I will give my mite." Why, my friends, the mite is the mighty thing—the mite is *all*. Give your mite ; I will catch you on that word if you like. We want your mite here in Regent Square as soon as ever you can do it. Let me make my appeal for Christ and the souls of men. We office-bearers talked about it here not long ago, and we are all agreed about it ; we are all enthusiastic about it among ourselves. There is perfect agreement about this—that if we had a large receptacle that would hold three times the people who are here, down there at King's Cross ; if between one Sunday and another it could be let down from heaven, like Peter's great sheet, a receptacle that would hold *all manner of people*, clean and unclean, Scotch, English, and Irish, we could have it filled every Sabbath day from now, for the purpose of spreading



the Gospel in this densely populated neighbourhood all round about. *And your mite will do it.* There is no reason why we should not have it; it is only the money, it is only that that keeps us back.

We are agreed about it, and you say, "Well, I am prepared to give my mite." Now, if that is true, my King's Cross Tabernacle is as good as built and opened, and I almost feel as if I were in it. How long shall I have to wait? I am not speaking wildly, but out of my very heart, and to you. "They of their abundance; she of her want cast in all that she had." But the widow's mite is hard to give. Many of our wealthy people do make soul and conscience of the distribution of their wealth, not only in Church ways—though there they might have their giving advertised on every hoarding, and they would still be as humble as possible, and still giving large amounts, secretly, of which nobody in this world will ever hear till the day when the secrets of all men are disclosed. I am in no fear or danger of being in the slightest degree misunderstood; but it is the widow's mite that is hard to give, and it is the widow's mite that calls down Christ's commendation. As one said, "Give until you feel it; give until you wince; give until it comes to the 'quick;' give until it is like something run in under the nail; something that makes you say, 'Ah! can I?'" And then, keep on giving until you do *not* feel. Give until you touch the quick; and then *keep on*, keep it up till you get hardened, so to speak, till true, honest giving of your substance to God becomes use and second nature.

And then see the difficulty for this woman, in a certain direction. About this very collection to-day, men may be inclined, even here, to draw tight their purse-strings, and say, "Well, there is so much about the Hospital management that I don't like." Aye! and this woman might have said, "Why should I give anything to the Temple?" The priests at that very time were bad men. "Why should

I support positively immoral men in the Temple?" God Almighty was nursing His wrath against the Temple, and in forty years from this time, by the hand of the Romans, God was going to scatter it along the ground.

And this woman was going to be a supporter of that! How easily she might have said to herself, "Well, I am poor at any rate, and why should I keep up the scandal and downright iniquity in connection with the Temple and the Temple services?" *But she gave to God!* It was the law and the testimony. No matter how men might pollute and degrade, back of all she saw God, and she put money into God's own lap, she put it into His own palm. God's palm is the bottom of the collecting-bag, and the money will not miss finding its way down to the naked palm if you put it in with this momentum. It will go down, down, down, and touch His palm, and touch His heart, and bring His commendation, "Well done!" Pass the priest, pass the Levite, pass the maladministration, pass all that. Your poorest contribution will sink down, down, down, and reach God's own hand and touch His loving heart. Be delivered from all criticism *that would feed your meanness*. That is what we want. I do not say that administration should not be inquired into and improved. Of course, I speak generally; not specifically. I do not say that so much money should be spent in salaries, and so on. And if you bring it closer still, and criticize our own Presbyterian ministry, and criticize my own salary, very well; I lie open to criticism. I only say, as an honest man before God, I want no more, not one particle more in this world do I want, than the free-will offering of the people. I am against seat rents, for example, as much as you. In the day when you put me on the basis of the free-will offerings of the people to support me, I shall be quite satisfied. I am quite willing to give up all taxed sources of revenue. I don't suppose I will become a single ounce less in weight than I am at present. It may possibly be a good "spec" from a worldly point of

view. I might make more! I do not for a moment say there is any self-sacrifice in what I am saying. I simply wish to explain that I do not shrink from criticism, and that when all criticisms are made, both fair and unfair, *the clear, steady light of this old story still shines undimmed*. In the midst of abounding wealth, in the midst of a religious system against which God Almighty was, as I have said, nursing His wrath to keep it warm, in the midst of all that, this woman gave her all, and was commended.

You might have said to her, "My good woman, you have made a mistake; this is the fanaticism of giving; you are a martyr by mistake, you are flinging your means away for nothing."

No fear! God is in it! God is at the bottom of it, and if we give to Him, it is ours to do to-day the fragrant deed that this woman did. I hope that if you have brought out too little with you, you will remember that you have a chance to come back at night and to give again. Ah, yes! look at what you give! Take it out of your pocket and look at it before God. Jesus is sitting over against the treasury. In these New Testament times it is more than that—Jesus goes round with the bag; He has come closer to the giving than in olden times—He is closer in upon everything now than He used to be. Jesus comes round with the bag, and you are going to put in that amount, are you? Let a blush of shame come over your face when you reflect that that is *hardly the price of a smoke*. And in the presence of Jesus—or else the preacher is a liar, and the prayer is a lie, and the hymn is a lie, and the whole thing is a pitiful sham and a mockery—in the presence of the Lord.

"I am going to give that amount! And when all is over, at the close, I am going to sing the hymn—

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present, far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

Oh, do not damn your soul at the plate or collecting-bag! May the Lord save us, for all of us need to be saved, or, at any rate, need greatly to be sanctified. My words may have been sharp, but I know my heart is right. I want to speak for God and the truth of God. The giving, after all, is to God. Remember the woman who broke the alabaster box of ointment, and was criticized; they said, "It is wasted, and you cannot afford it; or it should have been otherwise laid out." But Christ justified her, and said, "She has discerned *Me*, she has discerned the Lord's body; she did it for *Me*, for *Myself*; and wherever My Gospel is preached, there shall this also that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her."

I close with a word from Bishop Hall. He discusses this subject very quaintly. "For," said he, "what am I, what am I before God, but just two mites; a body and a soul—mere mites as regards His great infinitude. How happy I would be if I could give unreservedly my two mites to God, according to His right in them and claim upon them, and not according to mine. And how sure might I be that He would graciously receive them, and how infinitely happy should I be in that acceptation." Yes, my hearers, give yourselves to God; these two mites, yourself, your body, your soul; give them to God, with all the pockets that are in them, and God will take you all, and use you all, and bless you all. Amen.

### THE COLLECTION.

# Regent Square Pulpit.

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SOLOMON'S CHOICE.

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## An Address

TO YOUNG MEN AND MAIDENS AT REGENT SQUARE  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

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“In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night : and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.”—1 KINGS iii. 5-10.

YOUNG people here know what the object of our meeting is; the object being openly and avowedly to get you *to decide for Christ*, according to a phrase which is more than a phrase. It expresses a great substantial reality.

When I announced my subject you perhaps said, “Ah, well, preacher, but these Old Testament people got a chance that we do not get. If God would come to me in a vision as He came to Abraham, to Isaiah, to Solomon, there is no saying what I might do or be; but in these New Testament days there are no dreams and no visions such as used to be. It does seem to me that these Old Testament people got a chance that I am not getting.” My dear friends, so far from that, we are in far better circumstances than they were. I have not taken time to

read passages from the New Testament, because if I had I should not have known where to stop. But if God's words mean what men's words mean, the chance that Solomon got in a dream is just what we are getting in the Gospel this afternoon, in broad daylight. The Gospel means, not that these old visions have vanished away, but that all that was true and substantial in them has simply been, as in a painting, made to stand out in greater vividness and nearness. The Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel stands before us, and says, literally, "Ask what I shall give thee." Hitherto ye have asked, a great many of you young people, nothing : you heard, heard, heard ; but we are wanting to bring all your hearing and knowledge to a point. So is God this afternoon : and not in a dream, for that might be hazy, and you might wake and say, it was very nice, but it was only a dream. But in daylight we are asking you to understand that Christ is standing before you in life's morning march, and saying, "Hitherto you have asked nothing ; you have been strangely dumb and silent : ask what I shall do for thee : ask Me anything that you want, and see what I will be and do." Or, to change the figure : as He stood before the blind man of Jericho, He said, "What wilt thou that I shall do with thee?" So He stands before men and women wherever His Gospel is lifted up. The Gospel in the Old Testament and in the New is simply brought out by these vivid narratives ; in the Old Testament God saying to Solomon, "Ask what shall I do for thee ;" and in the New Testament, God, in the person of His Son, standing and saying, "Ask, ask,



what I shall do for thee." The Lord said to Solomon, "Ask what I shall give thee."

The next thing to notice is, that Solomon showed that, humanly speaking, he was worthy of this chance, by the way in which he did not jump forward and eagerly ask for some temporal thing. Remember, he was a king upon a throne : remember the power in his hands, the might and magnificence that was all round about him, and he was bound to see and appreciate it. The eldest son of the Prince of Wales knows perfectly well where he is and what he is ; you do not need to tell him. He is beginning already to feel the reins in his hands, I have no doubt, and nobody wants him to be a whit less than that. Solomon was in that position, and he might have thought of a score of things—a score of things for personal aggrandisement, seeing that he was young, that he had just stepped out into the realisation of power and privilege. But Solomon showed his wisdom, his preparation for the great largess of bounty in which God came to him, in the way in which he did *not* use his imperative of asking upon God's imperative of offer. He seems to take a round-about road. Let us endeavour to follow him.

He started off and said, "Thou hast showed unto Thy servant David, my father, great mercy, according as he walked before Thee in truth and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with Thee." Strange—is it not?—that when God comes to him with this great offer, the first thing that springs before his mind is the image and memory, the life and character, of his father. And before he comes

to God with his request, with the blank cheque that God had so generously given him to fill up, he goes round-about by his father, and in that way he comes back to God.

After all, God does not fling Himself away upon anybody. If there is any senseless young fellow or young girl here, my dear lad, my dear lass, let me say to you, in all sincerity, you may go on through life and get nothing out of God's Gospel, simply because God will not fling Himself away on senseless folk. The old divines used to talk about "prevenient" grace. I believe it was too subtle and analytical and metaphysical; and that you ought not to split up grace; but our forefathers liked it. Still, there is the fact that when God makes the offer, He knows to whom He is coming. Now, wake up, open your heart; step clear of your littleness; step clear of all in your life, character, and surroundings that will say to you, "Oh, the difference between Solomon and me; preacher, your illustration has no parallel to my case; you cannot make a rail to bring it up to me."

God makes His offer genuine and real; and He knows to whom He is making it. This is an hour, I believe, to be remembered to all eternity by some of us. Depend upon it, if we do not, it is because we did not rise to grasp what God had given us. When God came to Solomon in a dream, and stood before him, and said, "Ask what shall I give thee," he said before he answered, "Thou hast showed unto Thy servant David, my father, great mercy." It is well to bring your father, to bring your mother in front

of you. The very front rank of every generation is the babies, and just behind them are the young lads and girls in Sunday-school; back behind them are the young men and women, and behind them the "potent, grave, and reverend seniors" that are gathered round you.

Now, I want you to reflect before you make up your minds—to do what Solomon did. It was human and heavenly wisdom combined that made him look back and see what his father did. I want you to do the same thing. Solomon does not indulge in great praise nor in great depreciation. David was a man that you could have overpraised. You could have talked of David as if there was never such a man. And if you were the other kind of temperament, you could have found other things in David that would lead you to run him down. Young people often exaggerate the good or the bad. Now, Solomon did neither the one nor the other. Solomon might have praised up David or run him down. You might do the same. You might say, "He was a royal profligate; think of what he did." You could have buzzed like a fly round that sore spot, or you could have spoken about the good. Now, we are not asked to do more than Solomon did. I neither ask you to praise your father or mother up to the skies, nor to run them down; but if you look at them fairly you can strike this average, and say what Solomon said. When I look to those who stand immediately behind me, and have been living longer than I have, I can see what Solomon saw in his father, *that religion was either the best or the worst*

*thing about them.* The best thing about your father was his religion, or it was the worst. If he was a true and real follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, that was the best. You are not asked to say he was perfect, but to know and rate him according to that. It may be he was only a hedger or ditcher; he may not have been a great man at all. But what was he before God?

Some of you ought to hasten into the kingdom along this line, simply because your father was the grand man he was. It is a shame for some of you not to decide for Christ, bearing the name you do. That name, to kirk and market, your father carried for many a day, as the name of a man who feared God and had no fear of man, who knew, and loved, and served as well as he could, with many faults and failings, the Lord Jesus Christ. And if he was not a man from whom you can take much light and encouragement, he was the failure he was, not because of religion, but for want of it. This is a solemn thought for parents as well as for children. Your father did well or ill *according as* he walked in truth and uprightness before God.

Solomon had this great advantage, that when he looked back on his father, the light that shined from his father's record would guide him to a right decision. God grant it may be so with you. If it is not so, the very dimness and darkness that comes from ungodly parents should be a beacon light to put you right where they went wrong.

The tendency to-day of young people is to be very

flippant. "Oh, those old people are old fogies! What do the old people know? The world is ours, and we are going to make a world of it." Solomon was not of that sort. He did not say, "David was a small man compared with me, and I will put things right, and show to this people what it is to have a king over them. David, my father, had a poor beginning, and never got clear of it: he began at the plough-tail and with the sheep, and the smell of the sheep always followed him." Is not that a little thought to-day by young people when they think of their forbears? Beware of that, and of that spirit of contempt for those older than yourselves.

I remember speaking to a couple of young fellows, sons of a medical gentleman. The father had been a doctor before them, and they took to studying their father's profession. The father was not any great light in medical circles, toiling and moiling among the people in a city, whether he was paid for it or not, but always getting work. The father told me that he scarcely knew the names of things—as the new learning had taught them to his sons. They used to speak in quite an off-taking tone about their father's attainments and achievements in the medical profession. Time passed, and they came out in academic glory, and issued upon the sphere of life and activity. After they had settled down for some time, I met them at their father's house, and one said, "Well, Jimmy, I begin to see the old man had not our training, and never took our honours and degrees, *but he could prescribe.*" What is a

doctor if he cannot prescribe? When the old man was called in to a case of sickness he knew more, perhaps, with his finger-ends than they with all their books. Do not despise your father; do not despise your mother. They know what life means, and you have all that to learn yet. You are a young lady, a young gentleman, and your father and mother wore hodden grey. See to it that it was not more a robe of righteousness than the finer spun stuff that is decking you.

Solomon said, "I can see the best thing about my father was this, he rose and prospered *in so far as* he walked in truth and sincerity before God, and I will try to do like him there. It was religion that made him the man he was." Dear young friends, do not despise the religion your father had, the religion that your mother had. Depend upon it, it was the very best legacy they left you. Do not make it your boast, as the poet says, that you "descend from loins enthroned the mightiest of the earth," but say,

"Higher, far, my proud pretensions rise,  
The son of parents passed into the skies."

Some of you have that in your birth and pedigree—the children of saints—and it is time you were out and out for Christ, just out of that consideration.

Solomon continues: "Thou has made me king instead of David: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in." There, he looked into himself, and he passed an opinion upon himself and his powers and attainments, which is so uncommon among young people. This is where the greatness of Solomon comes out. Would God he had always remained at this point. "I am great as regards my descent, I am the son of David, and he was no small man. Great as regards position." That was true:



he was a king. "Great as regards my prospects;" but it was grand to hear him saying of himself, "I am but a child; and I am here in the midst of an awful maelstrom of a world, with conflicting tides of temptation around me, and I feel like a baby in the great bustle of Jerusalem's traffic."

Now, what is wrong with some of you up to this hour is the want of that humility. If I thought this was the last time I was to preach—I say it deliberately—if I thought this was to be my last sermon in Regent Square before I pass beyond the veil—I would die with something of contentment, notwithstanding all my sins and shortcomings, personal and ministerial, if only this would be my recollection—that at the last opportunity I had to preach Jesus Christ, especially to young men and women, I charged them before God to be not highminded, but humble and contrite and holy. It is the road into the kingdom; it is the road into God's regard; it is the road into the regard of all people whose regard is worth having.

Solomon said, "I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in."

"The bird that soars on highest wing  
Builds on the ground her lowly nest:  
And she that does most sweetly sing  
Sings in the shade when all things rest.  
In lark and nightingale we see  
What honour hath humility.

"The saint that wears heaven's brightest crown,  
In deepest adoration bends,  
The weight of glory bows him down,  
The most, when most his soul ascends;  
Nearest the throne itself must be  
The footstool of humility."

I charge you this afternoon that ye be not highminded,

that ye stoop, and stoop, and stoop, for the sin of youth is so apt to be a high mind and lofty look, and these things are an abomination unto God. So Solomon looked inside, and said, "There is nothing in me." And I believe he said it with sincerity.

But He also said more. He virtually said what I wish you would say, that unless you get heavenly wisdom you will make a bungle of this life, sure and certain. Unless there comes to you, this afternoon, heavenly grace and wisdom, then I am face to face with a company of young men and maidens who are destined to turn out heart-breaking failures for eternity. You may prove to the world that without the grace of God you may get on wonderfully well, and I do not deny it; and if life only meant getting on in the world, getting on in your profession, getting well settled, then I would not be here to trouble you with this high doctrine. But life means death and judgment and eternity. Time shoots forward to the Judgment Seat, and we are all in for it. Every soul of us must appear before the great white throne of Christ, and it is because life means that, that I ask you to take Solomon's view: "O God, unless Thou sustain me, I will go utterly wrong." Assuredly, as if you asked an infant of days and months to toddle down to King's Cross, through all the whirl of traffic. It would certainly go wrong, and if left to itself would be run over and killed. So, my young friends, take the kindly advice of some of us and save yourselves from our mistakes and our follies. You cannot begin too soon to tell God how foolish you are, how weak you are, how utterly helpless you are, in view of the awful issues that are involved in this—that you have at this moment life and death and eternity all in your keeping.

"I know not how to go out or come in." The "king-becoming graces," as Shakespeare would say, are in it, and they become a cobbler as well as a king. I want my cobbler to have them if he is to become a successful cobbler, for a cobbler's life, as well as a king's, shoots beyond the grave into eternity. Therefore, I ask, how are we facing what is immediately in front of us?

Then Solomon looked round about him : he prospected a bit. Out in America and Canada, that great country where fortunes are made, so they say, and lost whether they say it or not, men go into certain regions *prospecting*. They are wanting to open a mine, and they see what a certain region is like. They tap here and there to see if they are going to make a fortune out of its rocks. So Solomon was *prospecting the future*. He felt life here and there, and touched its current, and he passed this verdict upon it : "I am in the midst of Thy people, which Thou hast chosen ; a great people." And I think he meant, "Life as far as I can prospect it is going to mean for me hard work and plenty of it." Kings, of course, might go rolling about in carriages and never do anything else but attend processions, and never hear anything but congratulatory resolutions, and attend banquets, but if a king does that the people despise him ; that is not what a king is here for. He is here to work as a king, as well as a cobbler is here to work as a cobbler. Solomon felt that. Although he was lifted up socially, he had no idea that his life was going to be nothing but rolling and lolling about, with "Three cheers for Solomon !" He saw there would be work for him to do. Some of you think the only working-man is the man who is hammering away with tools, and that we black-coated gentry know nothing about work. Some of you are coming into this

ministry, I hope, and then you will remember what I say, that the hardest work in London is that of the conscientious minister of the Gospel. You have never bent your back to such work, to such awful work, work that grinds a man to powder and makes him say every day, like Solomon, "My God, here is a work that needs angels, and I am but a child; I neither know how to preach or pray." Now, dear lads and girls, get rid of your dreaming and stargazing; get rid of the idea that life is an oyster, and that you are going to open it, and eat. I would rather you took Solomon's notion, who surveyed life from the elevation of a kingly seat, and yet was honest enough to say and feel, "I am to be a busy man." If you mean to be an idler, a trifler, shiftless and lazy, go and ask the gravedigger to hap you comfortably under the clod. You have landed on the wrong planet. In those Oriental times the king was really the father and judge of the people. They could come running to him, just as you can to Bow Street and other places to-morrow, to ask for advice. They could go to the king for anything. I think in the next chapter you find a miserable squabble, and it goes straight up to the king on the throne, passing all meaner lights and judges. The king was closer to the people than kings are now in Western civilization. Is that *your* view of life? I remember the dreams I had. I am sorry to say money was about the biggest thing I had before me. I am making the honest confession so that you may begin to blush along with me, not for me. We are going to get on, and we are not going to have much trouble in doing it. The world somehow or other is going to flow upon us. I wish you would understand that for most of us the world will give us more kicks than ha'-pence. You may

live for eighty years, my dear young fellows, but you will have a hard toil of life.

Am I saying that you have mean ability? No, but with the best ability you will not necessarily get on. Young girl, you are sweet and fair to-day: you will grow up, marry, fall into ill-health; you will have children, maybe, and that will bring you more trouble, and by the time you are forty-five or fifty years of age you will be bent and weary to get away. Life, for a great many of us, means that. One by one the gorgeous dreams of youth disappear; the rosy hopes go out into blackness; the bright expectations illumine the horizon, and then fade into the light of common day; and even if you were kings upon a throne, life would mean what I have said already.

Now, will you settle yourself for the work? Life means business, toil, trouble, sweat of body and brain. Brace yourself for it; gird yourself for it. Be sure that is what is coming. You say, "That is hard." It is not hard; it is good for you; it will take the softness out of you. You are going to resign your situation because you only get fifteen shillings a week, and what is that to your gorgeous capabilities? You are going to strike, and bring down the company! You will soon understand that the company will get on without you. I have tried it. I struck. I really believed in getting more for my work. I blazed out against a railway superintendent, and that shows no small courage, and the end of it was I had to turn in again. I have no heroic story to tell about how I knocked governors about. They knocked me about. I made a big storm twice, and resolved either to get out of the railway, or get on in it. I speak in this homely way to drive away the glamour and the moonshine that you are mistaking for sunshine. Moon-

shine is a kind of shining, but the worst of it is, it is romantic, the lights and shadows are unreal, and when you come along the place when it is daylight, you say, "It is not nearly so beautiful as by moonlight." Now, I am trying to show you facts, and successful men in this mighty city will tell you, life means toil, life means trouble, life means anxiety, life means a heavy battle, a heavy burden: it does not mean rolling and lolling about and having great fortunes dropping into your gaping mouth. No; it means what it meant for Solomon, long ago.

Then, after looking back to his father and summing him up, and summing himself up, and saying, "There is nothing in me;" and, after summing up life and saying it means duty, it means hard work, and plenty of it, then *he looked up*. You see the process: backward, inward, outward, upward. He said, "Give me a wise and an understanding heart; build me up just where I am broken down; put the plaister on the weak place; put in Thine own great almighty arm just where I need nothing less than almightiness to undergird me." "And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing."

I have come to the end. Sitting where you are, in the midst of all you are and what you want to be, and of what Christ wants you to be, and the world, will you turn your back on the devil and the flesh, on all the delusions round about you, and just look to Jesus Christ, young friends, and say, "Give me a wise and understanding heart, to know good and bad?" It needs heavenly wisdom to make you know good and bad. You need the unction from the Holy One. Every day you rise, every time you go out of doors, you need that wise and understanding heart that instinctively says,



"That is bad; good-bye: this is good; come to me." Is it not a strange thing that the animals for the most part, as men tell us who are skilled in the knowledge of them, instinctively reject what is bad, and take what is good? Put animals into a field where there are noxious plants and innocent plants, and those animals will go on browsing, you may think indiscriminately, but just watch them, and you will find they instinctively put aside what is bad, and take what is good. Solomon said, "O God, I have not got it; I have lost that, for I am a sinner: O God, restore that faculty to me: give me a keen scent for righteousness and unrighteousness: give me an intuitive perception and understanding to know what is good and what is bad, that I may cleave to the one, and hate and despise the other." To know what is good in literature, and what is bad in literature, to know what is good in business, and what is bad in business, to know what is good in companionships, and what is bad in companionships. O God, give us a wise and understanding heart to discern good and evil, so that we may cleave to the one and hate the other.

That is just another way of *asking to be converted*. The Old Testament phraseology and the New Testament phraseology run into one. It is just the same as saying, "O God, save me from my foolishness and wrong opinions, direct my unwary feet. O God, be Thou my sufficiency, my help." Will you choose God to-day?

When I think of Solomon's after life, I feel inclined to wish that somehow he had asked a little better than he did. I think his old father, if he had got the chance, would have said, "Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me." Solomon did not put it that way, and the almost ruin of Solomon was an unclean heart. Young

men, you know where Solomon went wrong ; young women, you know where Solomon went wrong. If he went wrong there with all his gifts and with all his wisdom, do you think that *you* will easily and naturally go right? I do not think it, therefore, to-day, ask God to make you wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ. Will you choose Him? God is saying, "Ask." Answer Him back and say, "O my God, lest I should ask wrong, I will ask in a way that is sure to include the right way: "Lord, give me Thyself; and, when I have Thee, I have all things." That is the offer of the Gospel, and no vision. There is no ambiguous language, no dimness or mystery about it. The Lord Jesus Christ says, "Put thy hand in Mine, and I will be the Man of your counsel, and the Guide of your life. I will be your Master. I will see to your business. Give yourself to Me; and through health, and through sickness, through prosperity and adversity, I will make you an eternal success."

"Many a foe is a friend in disguise,  
Many a sorrow a blessing most true;  
Helping your heart to be happy and wise,  
With faith ever precious and love ever new.  
So stand in the van,  
Strive like a man;  
This is the bravest, the cleverest plan,  
Trusting to Christ, will you do what you can?"

# Regent Square Pulpit.

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A GOOD DAY'S GLEANING.

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## A Sermon

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 22ND, 1890, AT  
REGENT SQUARE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL

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TEXT —Ruth ii. 19.

LET us fix our attention on the question in the nineteenth verse. "And her mother-in-law [Naomi] said unto her [Ruth], Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she showed her mother-in-law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to-day is Boaz." I wish, my friends, very simply to accommodate certain points in this narrative, and certain reflections suggested by the question addressed by Naomi to Ruth, to our own circumstances.

This story is so familiar to us all, that no time need be taken up in rehearsing it. The idea in my mind is something like this—by means of this question, "Where hast thou gleaned to-day?" (not, of course, forgetting the

historical setting, but using it, working that up as best we may), to question you gathered here to-day. I would like to ask, then, Who are you? How fares it with you? and What is your outlook? If you will allow me, I shall try to make the best use of that gossiping instinct which, speaking generally, is in all our hearts, and which prompts us all, more or less, to "want to know, you know." We all run down gossiping, and we all do it. Of course we mean by that, that our gossip is not the ordinary heartless, profitless kind, but that our inquiries are directed and informed by sympathy and wisdom, and by a true interest in the person concerning whom we want to know. Well, then, let us think of our text to-day as though it were some gentle, sympathetic person who has met us, and wants to ask who we are and all about us.

Let Naomi ask us this question, and let us answer, as far as we can, out of Ruth's experience. "Where hast thou gleaned?" Where have you been lately? What have you been doing? "What have you been up to?" How has the turn of events served you? How goes the day? What profit is there in your labour under the sun?

The first thing I am impressed with is this—if you will allow Ruth to answer the question for us—no matter how dark may have been your past life, no matter through what changes and hardships you may have come, you are not justified in giving in to melancholy, much less to despair.

If that is your condition of mind, Ruth's story ought to help you. Do not sit down and fold your hands, and say, "My hopes are buried; a wall has been built across my path; I am entangled in the land; the wilderness has shut me in; I am like a derelict ship, I have lost compass and rudder, the masts are broken, the sails torn, I am at the mercy of every wind that blows." Ruth might have said that. If you had stood up before her, and asked who she was, and what she was doing, and what were her prospects, she might have said, "Really, you need hardly ask me who I am, I am of no account whatever; go and ask somebody who has something to tell, who can give you a story with some meaning and purpose and hope. As for me, in my life there is no light, no hope. My crazy bark is whirling like a nutshell in the sea. Years ago I thought I was somebody. I was Mrs. So-and-so; I had some name and note and some mark. I could have told you then of plans and purposes. My heart was young; my hopes rose high. But now—

" Oh, I'm a puir hairst lassie,\*  
That gleans the lea'-lang day."

Among these rigs I scrape a living with my fingers' ends. She might have said that, but we know to-day that there was no life more full of Divine purpose and hope than the life of this poor widowed, forlorn woman standing sick of

\* Poor harvest woman.

heart amidst the alien corn. That morning she went out to work with a tear in her eye and sadness nestling at her heart, and the lump, as in your own case, perhaps, while I speak, the lump continually rising in her throat. Now, don't you sit down and mope; do as Ruth did. That very day, under an inspiration greater than her own (if you look at the beginning of the chapter), Ruth the Moabitess said, "Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace." Do not sit still; go on with your round. If things are dark when you look back, and dreary when you look forward, do not faint or repine. Cast about, go out and forage somewhere. Don't sit indoors and let all manner of gloomy thoughts swoop down upon you. You cannot help trouble coming, but there is no reason why you should just let it fasten on you. The old saying puts it, "You cannot keep the ravens from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building their nest in your hair." You cannot prevent sorrow and trouble, but you can rouse yourself, and shake yourself, and pull yourself together, and say, "I will not sit still, and fold my hands and die. 'Tis a busy world, let me go out and see whether I cannot find some engagement, however humble, in its affairs." Do the thing that lies next to your hand; go back to the ordinary common work-a-day world, and you will find relief. A new morning has come; be you a new man, a new woman, for the new day that you



never lived before, and that you will never have to live again. Be as new as the sun, while you are also, so to speak, as old and as familiar. Go out, for between you and me, let me whisper in your ear—the world is still God's field. The earth is the Lord's; and the Proprietor still walks over His fields.

“She went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech:” and thereby hangs a tale. Now, I am not going over the whole story; I just want to weave in certain threads as I go along. “Where hast thou gleaned to-day?” If, in answer to my question, you would say that you are nobody, that you are of no account, and that all life's plans and purposes have come to one swift catastrophe, I rebuke you from Ruth's history. You may be poor and obscure; so was Ruth; but a new day had dawned. The darkest hour is the hour before the dawn; when things are at their worst they begin to mend. Keep up your heart; greater, if you only thought it, are the things behind the scenes in your favour, than all that seems to be against you.

Go out, go on; God lives, blessed be my Rock, and let the God of my salvation be praised!

Then, when we stand here and ask, and answer, the questions that flew swift as a weaver's shuttle between Ruth and Naomi,—does not this come out? You have not

been working in vain, if you will tell the truth. If you look at things aright, and take yet another look, especially those who are downcast and saddened, tell me if you are not bound to admit that your history is beginning to show glints of sunshine, here and there, through its darkness and chaos. Somehow you are getting conscious of it that there is an upper light breaking in. When Ruth went home that night, and those two women laid their heads together—and that was a case where two heads were better than one; it was not a case of two times nothing—they began to understand that there was more in this day than simply the day's work, with the little pile of corn to show for it at the end.

Are you not conscious of it, my hearer, when you consider things in the sanctuary, and set them in the light of God's Providence and Word; when you look before and after, how are you just the rudderless ship you were saying you were? I do not think it is fair or true. I think that Ruth here instructs us. Tell me the tale of your day hitherto, and although I am not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, I think, by the light of God's Word, I could read something of Ruth's "hap" into it, without doing violence to it. I think I could show points where Ruth's case and yours and mine are very like each other after all. Yes; and our great hope is that the resemblances are to increase; and that poor and miserable though our beginning has been,

through the grace of our Redeemer we shall inherit the land, the earth on which to-day we toil.

Now, think of the man who came into the field, whose presence opened up a new chapter for Ruth, and opened a wonderful chapter in God's purposes for a great while to come.

On what small hinges do great doors hang! As I said before, so I repeat, the world is still God's-acre. It is not a field of riot, of chance and haphazard. It is not true that this is a world in which only the fittest survive and the weakest go to the wall. It is not true that the race is to the swift and the battle to the strong, and that unless you are either wise or clever, or have a great deal of influence at your back, or something advantageous over and above what your own poor self is at this moment, your days are done and your career will end in chaos and old night. That is not true. Don't you see how the Gospel comes on the scene with the face of that man Boaz? Think of his name, "her hap was to light on a field," owned by a man named "*Strength*." Boaz comes on the field, where the forlorn widow was bending, scraping up what she could get; and the end of the story is that that big bronzed, wealthy laird lost his heart to that puir hairst lassie. It is a story, my friend, over which you have no need to hang your head. The wooing was a little different from ours, but quite as honourable.

Now, my friend, has the day come yet for you, when

it breaks upon you that there is no one near you who is a kinsman, and that all that belongs to the idea, "Redeemer," is in Him and with Him? His eyes are on you, and His heart goes with His eyes; and the end of it—oh, the end is that He will join Himself to you; He will betroth you to Himself for ever. To know Him and be known of Him brings to an end one's dreary, joyless days. It is like the ringing of wedding-bells in your ears, which shall peal for ever and ever. Has it been so? That red-letter day! I can see Ruth, if she lived for forty years afterwards, a comely old spectacled dame—pardon the anachronism—with silvery hairs, and I go and ask her her story. I am not sure that she will begin with the Moabitish days. I am almost certain that before five minutes are over she will be coming to that day when she went out with a big sigh and a sob in her heart, and bent to glean in the field, and she will tell you, with a blush coming over her faded cheeks, of the hour when she first saw Boaz.

Why, man, it is all true yet. Do you think God took all these verses in this Book that is always in a hurry, and that passes by kings and thrones with a kind of contempt, and then takes a long while, and a full dip of the pen, merely to tell a story about a widowed woman, and how she got married again? If it is God's Book at all, does not the Divine message of it come out in that very circumstance? Now, I say, has that day come to you—that day of days?

Has it dawned upon you in connection with your work-a-day life, with all its chances and changes and trials? Has the day come when the clouds have parted, and the light behind has begun to shine in, and the hills have been set back a bit, and there is a sense coming into your soul of roominess and ease and hope. Through fire and water, some one who has a mighty arm, and a loving heart behind the arm, is making things stand about to let you get through. Through fire and water He is bringing you to the wealthy place. Now, rub your eyes and take another look, for the Bible is true. Stand and look around you, where you are, and cannot you hear even yet Boaz' manly tread as He comes crushing through the stubble? I tell you He is always going about the field, this Boaz, this Kinsman, this Redeemer. His eyes are on you, and He knows more about you than you are giving Him credit for. Blessed is He who is taking knowledge of thee.

“Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where wroughtest thou?” Again, looking at this as a fireside gathering, as it were, to-day, at the end of one week, and before the new one, with its activities, is fully upon us, does not this come out of the question and the answer—That, after all, you have had unexpected success? Ruth's story shows us that, when we come across good times, when we come to what is called “good luck,” we are in danger then. There is a little verse that says “Let fall

some handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them that she may glean them." Ruth did not know that at the time—we know it since—and I am here to tell you what is going on behind the scenes, my dear friend. Here and there little nuggets have come to you, little bits of luck. Now, don't go away and say that that is come to you because you rose early and sat up late, because you were sharper than other people, because your wits are keener, because you have shuffled the per cents., so to speak, more cleverly. Put in God somewhere ; give God the credit, give Him the praise, give Him the glory, for, I tell you, it is all His. The Lord of the field accidentally lets things come your way on purpose !

Look upon your good hap as a token that somebody has been along before you ; somebody who knew who was coming after, and who let good things fall in your path. Is not your life filled with that ? Have not you come through days when you never expected, and you had no right to expect, that this help would be here, and that other blessing would be there, and when you arrive, lo ! there was this unexpected help, this unexpected increase, this unearned increment ? Don't take credit for all yourself. I am telling you how it was there. It is there because—there is something true about you the same as that which has caused a great deal of bitterness and angry discussion over in Ireland, and in Parliament—give me your ears,—because you are



being "shadowed." Night and day you are being shadowed—there is a Detective on your track. Oh, He is a wonderful Detective; it is not for your ill that He is watching over you, but for your good. He is a wonderful overshadowing God, is our God, and He likes, if I may put it so, to do good by stealth. It is not His way to come and put things straight into your lap, and to say, "Now, this is for you." Just as you when you would do a kindness to somebody, you do not like to do it yourself, so do it indirectly; perhaps through me, or in some other indirect way, you let fall a handful.

The blush needs to creep on the faces of some of us, for we are becoming purblind creatures, shut into this: that it is ourselves, and it is all ourselves. "*Mine* arm and the greatness of my might hath gotten me these extra handfuls." Well, keep them, if it is so. I would not finger it. If you have digged it and scraped it all yourself, then keep it. It was otherwise with Naomi and Ruth. We know that it was the Kinsman, the Goel, the Redeemer, who gave orders that those handfuls of purpose should be let fall. So it is with our true life, our spiritual welfare. More servants wait on man than he'll take knowledge of. We are infinitely better off than we are allowing ourselves to think. Now, what we have got as the result of the past day, let us beat it out in God's house, and understand whence it came; and learn this great lesson: my Redeemer, my Redeemer is

mighty, His name is "Strength." He says to me, "Fear not, the Lord thy God will help thee; the Lord thy God will not forsake thee."

I do not wish to occupy much time this morning, as I must speak in the open-air this afternoon, and be back here again to-night. And I shouted and sang so much with the Sabbath-school children yesterday at their outing in the country, that I want to secure that my voice shall last for the day's work. So, in closing, let me take another idea out of this question and answer.

"Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where wroughtest thou?" In the next chapter, towards the close, as this story still runs on and deepens in interest, you find this word. Naomi, gathering the whole together, at a particular point, and looking at it with her wise, keen, kindly eyes and heart, says to Ruth, "Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how this matter will fall, for the man will not be in rest until he hath finished the thing this day." I want to get a word here about to-morrow. I want to give you old Naomi's advice. Listen, my friend; let older heads speak to you, even let God speak to you:—"He who was, and is, and is to come," the Almighty, He who sees the end from the beginning, and whose eyes look out upon you from this story in this blessed old Book. Let God say, as though He were some old-tried friend who has been over the road before you, and knows all its turnings

and windings—let God speak a word like this to-day : Do not get fretful ; do not get desponding ; do not get over-eager either ; do not lag behind, but do not run too far forward ; take care of taking things too much into your own hands. You are only in the middle of things. As Naomi virtually said to Ruth, “ We are only in the middle ; sit still, my daughter, things are in higher hands. Unseen powers and forces are at work ; sit still, my daughter, until thou know how this matter will fall, for the man will not rest until he hath finished the thing this day.” So God’s Word says to all of us, to each individual gathered here to-day. We step in here, and we hardly know each other ; we step out again, and in five minutes after we are away from the church door it will be difficult perhaps to find three of us together, and we shall never again all assemble here. But meantime we have met with God’s Word, and in its own kindly way it has asked after our welfare, explained the lie of the land, and now it is going to tell us not only the things that are, but those that shall be, and that shortly.

Life is not the *mixey-maxe*y it seems to be. There is a plan, there is a purpose giving shape, aye, and blessedness, to-day to it all. Have you seen and understood ? There is a clue to the maze, and that is *The Man on the Field*, to whom all belongs, the mighty man of wealth. Do you know Him, and is His arm working for you ? Well, don’t rush now ; just go on steadily ; sit still, my daughter.

“He that believeth will not make haste.” Sit still, my soul ; be still, my hot and restless heart. For, you know, even after we begin to get to know the Great Redeemer, the Lord Jesus, the first blessedness, the first flush and glow of peace and hope, is apt to fade away, and we are apt again to be possessed with the old fears that things will go wrong again, and that what we had hoped for is not going to come to pass. Sit still, my heart, wait on thy God, leave God to order all thy ways, and trust in Him whate’er betide. Be sure of it that He who has begun, in the way of infinite wisdom in which He has begun, has not done yet. Your days are only in the beginning, you are not at the end—wait on God. “Be of good courage, He shall strengthen your heart—wait, I say, on the Lord.” “He who has begun a good work will carry it on until the day of Jesus Christ.” Look back and see what He has done already ; strengthen, and calm, and steady your hot and feverish soul ; and let me say this for your encouragement, what Naomi said to Ruth : “Ah,” she as good as said, “I know this man.” “Ruth,” she said, “I am a bad judge if I am not right in this : he will make the rest of the journey with considerable haste. I think I know him well enough to have this opinion, that he will not rest until he hath finished the thing this day.”

If Christ’s eyes do not look out upon us through that, then we may almost fail to find Him anywhere

in this Book. Sit still, my friends; it will soon be done. Sit still; do not rush ahead, do not take things into your own hands—wait on God; let God do His work; steady and settle your heart upon Him, it is as good as done, although it is not perfectly consummated. Oh, if we could only get that encouragement into our hearts to-day, what a burst of sunshine, even in the midst of this dulness, would come out upon us: “The man will not be in rest.” Are *you* a little eager? Does *your* soul, sometimes in spite of yourself, haste forward to the consummation? Much more does His. He had set His mighty heart upon you; He loves you with an everlasting love; He is weary to get you, and He is shaping and controlling all things in heaven and earth for just one thing—to finish His Redeeming work, and to get you home with rejoicing to be with Himself for ever and ever. May God bless His Word!

Amen.







# Regent Square Pulpit.

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PETER'S VENTURE ON THE WATER.

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## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

BY THE

REV. JOHN McNEILL.

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TEXT.—Matthew xiv. 28 to 33.

I SHOULD like this morning, dear friends, to be brief. I rather fear that, like myself, some of you are in some physical discomfort because of the rain, and that it would not only be unwise, but, perhaps, dangerous to prolong our gathering. Therefore, we shall not occupy ourselves with all this incident, but rather concentrate our attention on the deliverance wrought for Peter.

Let us come at once to the verse that opens this narrative, within the narrative of miracle and grace.

“Peter answered and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water. And He said, Come. When Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.” We see here something illustrative of the character of Peter and illustrative of the character of faith.

What are we to say about Peter? As we look at him climbing down out of this boat to go to Jesus, different views are taken of his conduct. Some say: "Ah, this is just, in its way, a rehearsal of the tremendous downfall that is to come by-and-bye, when he who said so loftily 'Though all men should forsake Thee, yet shall not I,' shall deny his Lord and Master with oaths and curses." "Here," they say, "is just a rehearsal of that over-confidence and over-boldness. He climbs down out of the boat to walk upon the water, only to bring himself in danger of a watery grave, but for the Lord's help." I think that that is an extreme view. I would rather take the view that Peter, at the beginning, at any rate, was right in what he did. My one great regret is that he did not carry it through well. It was well begun, and, according to the proverb, "Well begun is half done." But no amount of proverb can make half done whole done, and it was the other half in which he failed. Yes, he began well. We are glad that the Gospel narratives contain a story like this. If it had not been there, commentators would have been sure to say, as they read the narrative, "Now, why did these disciples get still more alarmed when they saw a vision of Christ, or what they thought to be simply a vision, though He assured them that He was the same Jesus who had left them but a few hours before?"

Why did they get still more alarmed? They would probably have said, "Here was a splendid chance for Peter or for John, or for some of them to lift themselves out of their fear and out of their alarm and to go to Him on the sea." We are glad that the Gospel narratives contain a

story like this. What a pity that Peter did not push on and make the whole journey. Let us learn some lessons for ourselves out of his beginning and out of his subsequent failure.

This was a new thing, an entirely new thing, and that is one of the blessings of it. There are great outcomes in faith in Jesus Christ if we would only yield to these outcomes when they struggle within us. Faith in Jesus Christ is anything but dull and flat and stale and unprofitable. Alas, alas! many of us make it that. There is a little glow and a little quiver when we first come to Jesus, and then everything fades away into the common light of day until we come to our death-bed, when we again hope for great revelations of the Lord, and a marvellous increase and accession to the lifting and glorifying power of faith in Him. But here Peter certainly leads us right. We have no idea, virtually, says Christ—and Peter so far is a proof of it—of what faith can do until we try. “If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye should say to this mountain, Be removed into the midst of the sea; and it would obey you.” What does that mean? I believe it means what it says. The Lord Himself is a proof of it. He did all His work by faith. Here as a man, subject to all our limitations of time and space of a sinless kind, yet through faith He lifted Himself up, and laid hold of the eternal will, and found that nothing to Him was impossible. So with His people after their own measure. “The works that I do shall ye do also.” A something like that with a great suddenness came into Peter’s soul. “Why

should not I go to Him?" and the work that Christ did he did also for a time. Peter walked on the sea to go to Jesus. On this morning there may come to some of us such an accession of faith. "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come to Thee on the water. Lord, show me a new thing. Give me faith in Thee. Give me strength: give me elevation. Let me see what I have never seen before. Let me bring out of the treasure-house things new as well as old." The Master was not displeased. The Master did not speak back quickly and say, "Peter, Peter, thou art allowing that worst thing in thee to come uppermost." Nay, I believe that the Master was pleased. The Master was glad to see the thought of such a thing dawning within his disciple's soul, and He only uttered one word, and that was "Come." "Come to Me." Oh! that the Church of God to-day, in the midst of all her distraction, might suddenly realize that there is a pathway out of it all to great success, if we would only open our eyes and have faith in God. It is time we were reaching out to new exercises of faith for ourselves, and striking out to new works of faith and love to the souls of men under our Master's eye.

' Behold the glories of the Lamb,  
Amidst His Father's throne,  
Prepare new honours for His name,  
And songs before unknown."

Peter prepared a new thing, but before he got the whole length he spoiled it. Let us begin where Peter began, and go on. It was well conceived, it was well begun—all commentators to the contrary notwithstanding. It is easy for

us to sit at home in our quiet study, surrounded with all our books, and to say, "This is Peter at his worst."

My brother, my sister, this applies to you. Some time ago you did something like this. You were called rash by the critics, and reckless, and inconsiderate. And the trouble is that you allowed those critical voices to come in upon your own spirit and to find a re-echo in your own breast. And now it turns out that you were rash, and reckless, and inconsiderate, because these criticisms told upon you—because these criticisms reduced you. If you had simply allowed them to blow by you like the idle wind, you would have carried that scheme to success; and then instead of coming round about you and saying, "We told you so; you never should have done such a thing," we should all have been around you praising you. You have done really a great deal of damage, more than you think, but it is not because you attempted the thing: it is because you did not carry it out. "Nothing succeeds like success," either among commentators or other people; and if you had only done the thing well, we should all have swung round to your side, and we should all have imitated you. Do I speak to any brother to-day whose heart is meditating some new thing—a wild thing, an utter absurdity to a low tone of faith? God speed you. On you go! I should like to see it done. I do not know that I would do it myself. It is safer, and keeps your clothes dryer, to sit in the boat; but if you think you can go out, mind you, I would like to see it done. I believe I should cheer you on. "Well done, Peter!" I would like to see

some reckless thing done, for we have all got too much flattened and battened down. In such a time as that, Peter's faith, just for a brief moment, stretched up to the true height that faith always ought to be at. When you see Peter climbing down out of that boat, as one has said, with the storm-light on his face, and the spray in his hair, you get just one glimpse of what Peter, by the grace of God, was always meant to be, and what you and I, by the grace of God, were always meant to be—a people filled with such a vision of the eternal Christ of God, that all things seen and temporal fall away from us and utterly lose their power to hamper or discourage us; a people in whom faith is sublimed to its highest reach and its loftiest and most noble exercise.

Walking on the water was impossible; but Peter did it so far. "When Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus." He did it; that is the puzzle of the commentators. It was not a commentator he was going to, or he would have said, "Stay where you are, you fanatic! stay where you are." No, he was going to Jesus, and Jesus said, "Come! come! come!" He is always glad to see faith come and lay hold of Him.

"When Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and began to sink, and cried, Lord, save me." What marred this beautiful story was that the commentators' spirit got into the poor fellow. After beginning so well, he began to get cautious. After beginning at such a sublime height of faith, he feared



and came down to the poor pitiful level of a Kantian philosopher, subject to the categories of space and time. He began in the spirit, and he ended in the flesh. He became carnal, and walked as a man, or, rather, he sank as a man.

“When he saw the wind boisterous.” It is a pity that we should ever get so keen-sighted as to see the wind. That is getting far too sharp on the temporal side of things. We ought to be blind to the wind. We ought to be deaf to its noise, and deaf to the roaring of the wave. If we would glorify God, and if we would show what faith is in its essence, and substance, and outcomes, we must go on as we began, “looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.” But when he saw the winds, he gave up faith. As somebody says, he began to be sensible that it was after three o’clock in the morning, and a rather wild morning at that; and down he went, quicker than I can take time to explain it. You have to forget all about what o’clock it is. You have to forget all about this nineteenth century. You have to forget all about your surroundings, if you would know God, and do His work, and serve the hour. There has to be a splendid inconsiderateness.

We are paralysed by thinking, and considering, and calculating. We say that we are walking by faith, and it is almost an infinite lie. We are walking by sight. We are walking by committee-men. We are walking by human foreknowledge and foreseeing, and a good deal of it taking the shape of craft, and mechanism, and artifice. We are

trying to invent some kind of cork soles, rather than to walk by faith. Peter began well. Who did hinder him? He tripped up over his own feet. For when a man begins to walk the waters he has to forget these ordinary means of locomotion. Let me put it plainly. Suppose I were so far "left" as to walk from here to the clock-gallery, it is perfectly evident that before I began I should need to be delivered from all consideration of such things as feet, and from all such considerations as those belonging to specific gravities. I should need to forget science and a great many things. Of course, somebody is very quick to say, "Preacher, you would not only need to forget feet, and you would not only need to forget about science, but you would need to take leave of your senses." My dear friends, I beg your pardon. If Christ stood above the clock, and said, "Come," that would considerably alter the situation, would it not? That is precisely the situation here. Christ stood upon the sea and said, "Come," and faith on Peter's part was not irrational. It was reason sublimed to its highest function. It should never be less. Never; you will not get that in the philosophy books, of course. You will get that here in the Bible, and only here. No, Peter was right when he began, and these considerations only pulled him down, "and enterprises of great pith and moment, with this regard, their currents turn awry, and lose the name of action."

"When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and began to sink, and cried, Lord, save me." Even when he is down he helps us; supposing he *is* rather far away from us

when he is coming out of the ship. I am afraid we are very much like him now. Will we learn from him even now? Poor sinking brother, sinking sister, going down, and down, and down, merged, but not submerged, as Augustine; I think, has put it, would you be lifted up, would you be brought to peace and safety, would you be delivered from the storm that is blowing through your rigging, and would you be calm and quiet? Then here is the way to peace—"Lord, save me." One eager, quick, urgent cry, "Lord, save me." Peter at his worst is more helpful than some of us at what we seem to think is our best. Whether walking on the sea, or sinking in the sea, there is something about Peter to give us a help. Now, suppose that he was utterly away from us, and we could not get any use of him when his faith rose to such—I am almost inclined to call it such a perilous height, why not get some good of him here? You are sinking. The water is up to your lips. Let your prayer be "a solitary shriek"—

"The bubbling cry of some strong swimmer in his agony."

Do not perish without a cry—"Lord, save me!" Young man, young woman, you are sinking, you know it; deeper, deeper, deeper, every week you live in London, down into this black, seething, boiling sea. Learn from Peter that all the distance between imminent destruction and salvation is bridged over when thy soul has cried, "Lord, save me!" Business men, you are sinking, making shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience. Down there in City life, where the great tides meet, your ship is being battered to pieces.

You are going down. Peter's prayer is your only hope. It absolutely fits you. It is not a "wonderful" prayer. I hear men whose prayers are phrases; and I read prayers that are far too fitly phrased, I am afraid. There is no eloquence about this prayer. It is a cry for help, rising on the shrieks of the tempest. Therefore, is it the splendid prayer it is. There was a fine earnestness about it that redeemed it from all risk of being rude or vulgar: "Lord, save me!" When will we learn to pray? I do not ask that this Church should resound with Peter's cry, but I do ask that the dumb devil should be cast out of us, and that from not a few hearts here, because of the desperateness of the case, Peter's prayer should be wrung out, "Lord, save me! I perish!"

"And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said to him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" It takes a great deal to translate what Christ put in a composite Greek word, "O thou of little faith"—*oligopiste* ("little-faith one").

"Wherefore didst thou doubt?" It is not "Wherefore didst thou start?" but "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" And after all, when we think of it calmly and quietly to-day, why did he doubt? When the Lord takes him by the hands and lifts him up, and plants him on what for the time is a sea of glass beside Himself, He virtually says, "Peter, Peter, where were your wits? Why, man, some time ago you did leave that same boat. Of course, then it was upon shore, but you left that same boat suddenly. You turned your back on it, and turned to Me On that afternoon

when I said, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men,' you immediately arose and left your boat. It was just the same thing that you were going to do this morning. Spiritually it was precisely the same. O thou of little faith, why shouldst thou leave the boat on the land to come to Me, and not see that it was precisely the same thing to leave it on the sea and come to Me? Since you left it on the land to come to Me, have I allowed you to perish? Your boat was your support then, humanly speaking. You gave it up. You kicked it from below you. Did I allow you to sink? Have you come to rags, and wretchedness, and poverty since you gave up your fishing-boat? Answer Me: Wherefore didst thou doubt? It brings no credit to Me, Peter, and brings still less to thyself, to begin so well and end in this fashion." And the same sting is in the Master's tone yet: "Wherefore didst thou doubt? Thou art bringing no glory to Me. Thou art belying all thine own profession." Wherefore this commotion, and fear, and alarm in Christian breasts in this church this blessed Sabbath morning? Wherefore? Let us look into Christ's face, and answer that question. There was no answer to it. Peter was dumb; and we are dumb. Oh! soul of mine, what ails thee? What frightens thee? When wilt thou be still and know that He is God, and that thou art always within earshot and arm's length of the eternal One? It is a stinging question. We begin well. What has come over us since? I am speaking to some of us who have been long in the faith. It is a good long time now, my brother, since you began discipleship.

You ought to be covering yourselves with honours and degrees by this time, and where are you? Young believers who look at you are utterly misled. Young believers who look at you, instead of getting the idea that the life of faith through grace must be a steady and continual walking above the waves, the heavings, and tossings of this earthly scene, are led to believe that, although at the first the Christian profession may have about it a wonderful elevation and a wonderful overcoming power, still as you go on and on it means getting down to midleg, and then getting down to the waist, and at last being barely able to keep your head above water. Is not that what they are apt to gather from us?—that it is not a path that shines more and more unto the perfect day; but that the path of the justified, the way of the believer, is a path that gets heavier, and more and more toilsome, as the time is prolonged. That does infinite harm. Let us hastily put ourselves right. Wherefore didst thou doubt? I have no doubt that standing there beside Jesus, Peter felt differently now—glad that he had begun, and ashamed that he had so bungled the business.

Let us be possessed to-day with the same mixed feelings. They will do us a world of good. Let us be lifted high up when we look at Christ. Let us be greatly chastened and rebuked when we remember what poor use we have made of Him. Why should we be afraid? David said it long ago—"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Why art thou disquieted within me?" Now, why? There seem to be reasons. "Lord, have mercy on me. Remember what a wild morning it is. See how these waves rage and toss.",



Still the Master dares to say, "Wherefore didst thou doubt? You had no right to doubt." Let me repeat what I have repeated from this pulpit till it is almost wearisome. Unbelief out there in the world and out there in books—a spirit of doubting—is mightily praised, and gets a great deal of attention to itself. But here in the Bible it is always a stupidity—always an unreasonable thing, with nothing to say for itself when the Lord questions it. You do not find Peter saying, "Wherefore did I doubt, blessed Master?"

" 'There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds.' "

No, he did not think of it. He said nothing. Doubt has nothing to say for itself. Oh, let us come back to unquestioning faith. Peter walking on the sea to come to Jesus—that is the type, that is the picture for the individual believer and for the whole Church. That is where we should be, and Christ says to us, as He said to him, "Come;" and He says to us also, as He said to him, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?"

Another Gospel tells us that after this was done the disciples were willing to receive Him into the ship; and therein is a parable, and with that I would like to close this brief comment on this interesting part of this interesting story. There are two ways in this business. We may obey the call of the Master this morning—"Come to Me;" and that is His call to all hearing my voice to-day. Whatsoever be your condition, the voice of the infinitely gracious Saviour, as He stands on the eternal shore, is — "Come, come to Me." May it soon fill the whole world with its

music, "Be not afraid: it is I. Come, come to Me." Well, but if that is too great a strain upon us—if we sit back in our pews, as most of the disciples sat back in the boat, and feel that it is beyond us, there is another way of putting it, "Then the disciples willingly received Him into the ship." Try that way. If the one way does not bring relief, perhaps the other way may. If the active side does not, perhaps the subjective side may throw light upon the matter. Say to Christ, "Blessed Master, come into my boat. Dear Lord, I am afraid to move. A great tempest lies upon me. I do not see how to come; but if Thou wouldst come into my ship, that would be the same thing, would it not?" Then will you, where you sit, say to Him, "Lord, come to me; Lord, speak peace." That is all He wants. He will answer you; but He will stay outside if you do not want Him on board. He will not force Himself upon you; and as long as we are either affrighted or positively unbelieving, we are outside of Him, and He is outside of us. But He gives us the opportunity. As on that morning long ago, He comes this morning into this assembly, and He goes right past the pew. He makes as though He would go farther, to call out your faith, to let you understand the situation, and grasp the skirts of this happy chance. As He comes past you, as you are toiling, moiling, sweltering, sinking, cry to Him, "Blessed Master! Man ahoy! Come in! Come in! Come in!" Or, to put it the active way, leave every mortal consideration that would keep you back, and go right to Him, all things to the

contrary notwithstanding. Say to your soul, "There He is, and I am in the middle of an awful turmoil and conflict, and it just seems as though it were utterly impossible to do anything but to go down. But here He is. Thou dost find thyself this morning, notwithstanding all these drawbacks, in the house of God, in the place of prayer, where Christ is with us.

Soul, go to Him. Leave all and clutch Him. You will not stick in the middle as Peter did. One bold little push, man, and you are in His arms. Take the first step, and the grace that enables you to take the first step clear of self, clear of unbelief, will hold you up till eternity's end. There is no doubt about it. He who begins has, in the beginning, the pledge of the ending, for it is Christ who begins in us. What are we afraid of? Why is it that we doubt? Why is it that we have no faith?

Again, I say, the Master's word is "Come;" and the great Day will show this—that all human speech has just run itself up into "Yea, yea," in answer to Christ's "Come," or a dour, dogged, hell-bound "Nay, nay." All speech has that in it—"Yes,

" 'O Lamb of God, I come,' "

or else, "No," kept back either by fear or whatever it be. And in the day for which all other days were made, God Himself will only have two utterances. One utterance will be the re-echoing, the final utterance of that: "Come, ye blessed;" Or else the thunder tone of the other word: "Depart, ye cursed."

The Lord bless to us this brief study of His Word. What

shall we sing to close with? I am a little puzzled. Shall we sing

“Come, Thou long expected Jesus

It is past three o'clock in the morning, and it is a wild time: and I am greatly needing Thee.

Shall we sing that with Charles Wesley? Or shall we sing with Charlotte Elliot,

“Just as I am without one plea,  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come”?

Well, we cannot sing both, and I think that the latter is the only one in our book. May God give us grace to sing it and to do it. Amen.



# Regent Square Pulpit.

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THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

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## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

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TEXT —Luke xvi. 19 to 31.

IN preaching from this subject, my friends, I shall be careful to avoid suggesting that the teaching of the parable is “Woe to the rich” and “Blessed are the poor.” The rich and the high-born are in special danger, need special and solemn warning; and the Word of God here and elsewhere certainly is clear of their blood. But I am not forgetting that pride, haughtiness of heart, selfishness, and all manner of spiritual wickedness may abound in the hearts of those who are not wealthy. Let it be honestly admitted; some of us here know how proud and exclusive and selfish we could be, although we have no blood to boast of, and are not gifted with a big purse. The poor can be, in their own way, as godless as the rich. The subject is here. We need a theme like this occasionally, each and all of us, to cool the fever in our blood, and keep us at our

proper bearings; lest, because of the quiet, even flow of our comforts, we might come into the case described by the Psalmist when he said, "Because they have no changes; therefore they fear not God."

"There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar." Afterwards this story leaves the earth, and goes on within the veil, into that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns. If the latter part should be strange and mysterious and somewhat hard to understand, we should not, *therefore*, fling off from accepting it. There is this presumption at the outset in favour of its fact and verity—that *at the beginning*, the fact and verity of the story are very palpable. Nobody disputes the substantial reality, without a single line of exaggeration, of the rich man clothed in purple and fine linen, and the beggar named Lazarus. While I utter it, all that is Oriental fades into its secondary place, and we find ourselves in a flash with the East and the West end of our own city laid before our eyes. Nobody disputes the calm, sober, sad fact and reality of the beginning of the story. Why, then, should we raise dispute when He, who tells the story with such sanity and calmness at the beginning, steps on with us within the veil, and, in the same sane, calm, and collected speech, continues the narrative where any other narrator would need to stop? Ah, yes! there is no exaggeration at the beginning; all is sober fact. The certain rich man and the beggar, poor, naked, and destitute in every



sense—this is London in the nineteenth century, and no tale of centuries ago that has grown dim and distant, and has proved to be shadowy and unreal by the test of modern criticism. No modern criticism can get rid of this. We have it to-day. How vividly the two extremes are put before us. Go to Hyde Park, and you see it—the rich man rolling, and poor Lazarus lying on the grass across the railing. To some this may seem to be a wild, ghostly story at the end of it, but again, I repeat, that it is neither wild nor shadowy at the beginning. There is no exaggeration, there is no caricature. Here there is no holding up of some lay figure to be kicked and pulled to pieces. There is nothing at all against the man's moral character in a certain way. He was simply very rich, very well-to-do. He is set forth as he is. There is no denunciation needed. There he is, is he not denounced simply by being described? "Clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day." The Bible handles wealthy folks very freely. I rather fear that if David had lived to-day, and had described wealthy people, saying, "Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart can wish," he would have been denounced in certain quarters as being a partisan, violently hateful of the rich, and violently and irrationally in love with the needy. But let us proceed.

"There was a certain beggar named Lazarus, laid at his gate, full of sores, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores." First, let me ask you to look upon

this picture and upon that. Again, how calm is Christ's tone? No working up of a scene, no working up of a situation, no rousing of Himself that He may fling Himself with fury upon a lay figure that He has created, and tear it with noble rage to pieces. No; calm as if He had the two before Him, and were simply, after a modern sense, taking a photograph of the two men; He takes them and sets them before us. Here is one difference. The rich man is anonymous. Even if he had been named, he would have been anonymous. The poor man gets his name. "A certain beggar named Lazarus." I would not like to put too much in that, but remembering who tells the story, it is evident that that is meant to be one of the touches. Names in Christ's mouth are not as they often are in yours and mine. Names mean something. Names have verities behind them, and this man's name Lazarus, or Eleazar, means "God is my help." What thoughts come crowding round about us as we get into the idea that this man really lived and wore that name—had that label upon him for all his lifetime. What a danger, so to speak, he was to God. How infidelity and scepticism might have gathered round that beggar with such a name, and laughed, and scoffed, and cried, "Aha! Aha! Look at this lump of wretchedness having over it this contemptible inscription, 'God is my help.'" How infidelity, scepticism, and atheism might have called benighted believers to this spot and said, "We will fight our battle with you here. Here, what have you to say to this? If your God be anything more than a mere name, why this helpless

lump whose name is the very refutation of your religion—‘God is my help’?” God has always to stand that, for a while, in every generation. If he has to stand it over the head of any poor soul here, lift up your head, my friend. Do not hang it, and let not your heart burst with vain and anxious thoughts. God will justify your name and all the confidence in Him that it implies; and as to all the mystery of His Providence that is locked up in it, God will bring that out as clear as the noonday sun before He has done with you. “Lazarus was laid at his gate full of sores, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.”

The extreme of misery. Again, I repeat, it is no exaggeration. It is sad, sober fact. I am face to face this morning, I fear, with some who do not know it. You never saw it. It is almost to your shame that you do not know it. It would deepen your Christianity. It would take the hot fever out of your blood. It would help you to bear with preachers when they do sometimes “let out” at the rich, if you knew this, as you do not. Now remember that this was written for us. Let us take care. Are there no beggars at our gates? are there no poor about our lands?

“And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments.” To me this is always one of the splendid passages of the Bible; the calm, majestic tones in which Christ flings aside the curtain and passes in. To Him “the undiscovered country” is familiar, and the books

of judgment are an open scroll. Let us hear Him. "Lazarus died, and he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." Do we believe that? Do we believe all that comes behind that little conjunction? "He died, *and*." "And" what? says the nineteenth century, or some of its philosophers and would-be teachers. "Lazarus died, and—there is an end. Buried or not buried, that is the last." What a poor world that would be! How misery would be heaped upon misery! How wretchedness would be increased! What an awful world it would be, especially for the poor and miserable, and those who have no hope of man at all, if that were true! Let us turn to the Bible. That man was a prince of the blood royal in disguise, all his days. That man was there not only to show the awful problem presented by the inequalities that are here in human life and society, but the man was there to show where the problem is to be solved, where the light is to break in. Where the darkness grows to its densest, there it is that the light breaks out. It is there that God will justify Himself when He is judged. "He was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom." Let us simply believe it. Let us get, like him, into the same faith. Let us reach his poverty of spirit, for poverty of purse will not secure this abundant entrance. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." For a little while down here they may lie at its gates very unlike its possessors; but one day they shall sweep through in a moment, dropping their rags, and donning the purple as they go. '

How great a change! How it alters our view of death,

my friends! Let us speak of death this lovely morning. Let us speak of death in scriptural terms and in a scriptural atmosphere. What a wonderful change Christ has wrought for us in connection with that word. "He hath abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light by His Gospel." There is a day coming, I believe, for all true believers, when we shall gather in glory, and some angel will come to us to speak to us of former days—some angel whose work was to attend on death-beds and to carry men's spirits into their final blessedness. He will speak to us of death, and of all the woe and bitterness of death, and of bereavement that we experienced down here, and—if I can so imagine us in that shadowless land—our faces will grow blank with the look of incomprehensibility, and we shall turn to one another and say, "He says 'death.' What is that? What is death?" Blessed be God, its name and its memorial will have perished with it. It will be so utterly abolished that in that world we shall fail to recollect its meaning. Life is the gaoler—not death. Death is the angel sent to draw the unwilling bolts, and set us free. Then sudden death is, according to Christ's own teaching, no evil—and if it were not so, He should have told us. For Lazarus, the believer, sudden death is sudden glory. There can be no exaggerating the blessedness that death brings to the poor and wretched who have held the faith and hope of the Gospel.

"Oh, change, oh, wondrous change !  
Burst are the prison bars ;  
One moment there, so low, so agonized ;  
The next beyond the stars.

Oh, change, stupendous change !  
 There lies the soulless clod,  
 The sun eternal breaks,  
 The new immortal wakes—  
 Wakes with his God."

Commend me to this Gospel for the East end of all this planet.

"The rich man died, and was buried." We have to stay a little longer *on the earthly side* of the curtain to get rid of the rich man. He has detained us here as long as he can. He is always large, and broad, and visible, until at last the earth covers him. There is no funeral mentioned for poor Lazarus.

"Rattle his bones, over the stones ;  
 He's only a pauper whom nobody owns."

That is it, if he does get a funeral. But, for the rich man, it is mentioned ; and, seeing that Christ told the story, it is one of the sinless sarcasms of the narrative that "the rich man died, *and was buried.*" Let us not forget the funeral. Be sure that you are there ; and, if you do not come in your own carriage, one will be provided for you ; and, if you are very dry-eyed over his decease—for he did live greatly to himself, and he died without being missed—lest you should not cry enough, there are hired mourners who will rend the air with their shrieks, and beat their breasts, and force out the tears "at so much a shriek, and so much a tear." That was the Oriental way. We have not greatly improved it in the Occident. One feels a great difficulty in keeping down the savagely sarcastic thought and word when he sees the pomp, and pride, and retinue that attend the burial of some titled, fat, wealthy NOBODY. I am not too severe. It is



impossible to be. "The rich man also died, and was buried." Let us remember that, this calm, quiet Sabbath; and, whether we are rich or poor, oh! let us reduce funeral trappings to the irreducible minimum for the sake of common sense and of Bible belief.

"And in Hades." That seems to some people to make a great difference. To change "Hell" into "Hades" with some people is to put out the eternal burning. That is a mistake. "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom, and he cried, and said, Father Abraham, have mercy upon me." Christ takes popular language, and popular ideas; but, if they were not true, He should have told us. He did not spare, on other occasions, to contradict popular language, and to go in the teeth of popular idea when it was false to God and Truth. And here when He uses it, He knows what He is doing; that He is putting His stamp on what is false, if it was false. The great point to notice is how calmly, with what majestic utterance Christ speaks. I have read fabled stories like this, so have you; but they have not told upon me. I read a remarkable book that came out not long ago, entitled "*Letters from Hell.*" It was remarkably well done; I was duly impressed by the intellectual and imaginative power displayed in it; *but I never for one moment thought it was true and real.* I always knew it was human. It was clever, approaching to genius, but it was done by sheer dint of human intellect and imagination. My thought is different about this. I read this

in my boyhood, and my mind lay down at the feet of the Teller. I read it now in my manhood, and my mind bows down, only with a deeper reverence. I am less critical the older I grow with this marvellous story. There is an air of verisimilitude about it, too strong for mere illustrative story-telling. "The rich man died, and in Hades, being in torments." Think of that. Think of this blessed Saviour of ours, think of His faithfulness to truth when He said that. How did this story come? I should have asked that at the introduction. How did it come? It came in this way. The Pharisees, who were covetous, heard what He had been saying before, and they derided Him. The wealthy, the proud, the avaricious, heard what He had been saying against covetousness, selfishness, and worldly-mindedness, and they derided Him, as some of the wealthy do yet. They may tolerate a little preaching before their faces on the Sunday, but go down to them on the Monday, and say to them, "What we preach is to tell on conduct," and they deride us. "Keep to your pulpits. We will go on with this mysterious devilment called business." They derided him; and—will you allow me to speak plainly?—the Saviour's indignation was up because of that derision of His too spiritual teaching. He flashed upon them the lurid light of the rich man in hell. He dared to say this. Standing where He stood, with that audience before Him, He was so faithful to the truth of God that He told a story that showed one of themselves in hell. Think of His faithfulness, and be astonished, O preacher—be alarmed as you think how to-day preachers are tempted to stand with hat in hand, and with "bated breath and whispering humbleness" to address the capitalist, the man of dazzling commercial

genius, and almost almighty social influence. Here is Christ, and He dared to tell them a story about a Jew in hell. He dared to say it. Let us dare to say it. Tell them that it is possible. An Englishman in hell! A Jewish gentleman in torments! Think of it. Do not go past the point of it for your soul's sake, nor allow me to do so. If ever you find your preacher softening and wavering here, give him ten thousand pounds, if need be, and send him into ignoble retirement. *He is not the man for you.* "In torments." Do not go past it. Stand and look till your heart begins to throb and your own face grows white with fear. And why? Why, because he chose to go there. And why? Because he tumbled in there kicking his foot against Lazarus, who was put at his gate to keep him out. Lazarus was meant to be his salvation from the peculiar temptations of too much wealth. For myself, I never was tried that way, and I do not ever want to be; neither do I want to be tried the other way. "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. xxx. 8, 9).

"And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me." How this story develops as we go along, led by the Master's own hand. Listen. This man was a religious gentleman, as many of our wealthy people are—as many here are. All of us here are, I suppose. The religion of earth was only a form; in the other world it is just the same. When he was on the earth, no doubt he was religious; no doubt he went to the Temple. He was a Jew; no doubt he contributed to the Temple support; no doubt he was greatly praised; no doubt he gathered his

co-religionists about his table, and, if you will pardon the anachronism, they stretched their legs under his mahogany, and praised him as a good fellow. And there is the end of formal religion and good-fellowship. He was a formalist here, and a miserable formalist there. In his awful misery all that he could bleat out was "Father Abraham." It was a glib word on his tongue when he was on this side of death; it is the only word on his tongue yet. "Father God" never seems to come within a thousand miles of his mind: he never knew God: he forgot God, and death, and judgment, and eternity. Let us get rid of juggling here with mere words, and names, and forms, and somehow or other through life's brief day let us be thinking of the eternal verities that are impending within reach of us in this house of prayer and preaching. Get hold of them; they are your life.

Abraham said, "Remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." I am not indulging in mere abuse. Abraham was a rich man, and he got there, and this man dared to say, "Father Abraham." What sonship was there between them? Not a particle, not a drop. He was no son of Abraham. Abraham had wealth—I had almost said, boundless wealth—but one day Abraham's eyes got a gleam in them; he saw a city that had foundations, no mere stretch of pasture, well covered with sheep and cattle, and the abounding tents of one's followers all around him. He saw that far-off city, and its glorious King, and from that hour he let the world go; he held it as though he held it not—he sat loose by it, and therefore he got in through the gates to the city. For he made God his strength as much as if he had been the

beggar Lazarus. Therefore they met together at the end of the journey, for they were animated by the same spirit. But this poor fellow cries and says, "Father Abraham." Oh, the vagueness and uselessness of a religious profession that is mere routine.

What a solemn word Abraham said to him. There is no scorn, and certainly there is no great show of grief—neither he one nor the other. I am not preaching my preconceived notions, and I am not going to preach yours either, my hearers (speaking to some of you), but I shall just go along Christ's teaching. There is no scorn, there is no contempt, there is no denunciation. It would be superfluous. But there is no sobbing and sighing on the part of Abraham, because this son of his, as he calls himself, has gone astray. That bond has been snapped, and the heart has not felt the tug of the break. He simply says, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things." The emphasis is on the "thy." What a word that is from the eternal shore which breaks in this day upon us who are yet upon the shores of time. That "thy" implies choice. He says to him virtually, "Be a man. You made your choice: stick to it. Lazarus made his, and he stuck to it, and he has got his reward." Each man goes to his own place. We are judging ourselves every day we live, and it is not the poor who go to heaven because they are poor, and not the rich who go to destruction because they are rich; but it is the forgetters of God who go to their own place, and the righteous who go into life eternal. And the basis of all righteousness is an evangelical faith in the God of salvation as expressed in Lazarus's very name. "Thy good things." Every day we live, and to-day again, we are shaping our eternal destiny. The world comes and offers to some of us.

and to many of us, its good things, but it tells us honestly (I will say that for it), "I have no commission to give you anything beyond this present life." What fools we are if we jump at the offer; but that is the folly we commit. The eternal world comes to us by this unworthy preacher to-day, and it says, "I cannot offer you gold, silver, houses, lands, or a fat position in this world. All the more that you come to me, you may have to give up the race for wealth, as you must give up the worship of Mammon and its service. But I have other good things: I have pardon, and peace, and patience, and hope, and comfort, and he that endureth shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be My son." These are the good things on the other side. Which do you want? You cannot have both, and it is the creed of some of us that we shall live to show that we can. "I will show, preacher, all your preaching to the contrary notwithstanding, that I can get this world and the next." No; your proof will break down, to your own utter confusion, just where it is most needed. This man's proof broke down. I can imagine how, sitting at his own table, he would have wiped his lips and discussed religion; he would have rolled himself on his magnificent couch and talked about "These poor people; a great deal of misery in the world undoubtedly, but, you know, there is a great deal done for the poor." So he went on. And here he is. Let us, each man, remember the responsibility for Lazarus that rests on his own soul. "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God of my salvation." I am responsible for Lazarus. It is not for nothing that we are brought together on the same patch of earth. He will either help towards my salvation or my condemnation.



I cannot go any further, as our time is gone. I may just close by saying how terribly Christ keeps up the interest—shall I say the excitement?—shall I go further and use that dangerous word, and say, how He keeps up the sensation that He so splendidly began when He carried us within the veil? What have you in the end of the story but your rich Jewish gentleman wanting to turn himself to the true business of time, when he got into eternity? Listen to me. That rich, wealthy Jew, who clothed himself with purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, now, in the eternal world wants, five minutes too late, *to be a home missionary*. Five minutes too late he wants to be a preacher of the Gospel; five minutes too late it dawns upon him what he was sent into the world for—first to save himself, and then his brethren; there dawns upon him his responsibility all round. He seems to see an addition to his torments, and to perceive that, unless Abraham does something, there will come tumbling in upon him, in awful succession, one, two, three, four, five brethren, sinking him deeper and deeper into an undone eternity.

That broke upon him. “I have five brethren; send to them; keep them out of this place.” It was too late for him. In God’s great mercy that five minutes has not run out for us. We have still time, my brethren, to turn ourselves, and time to use the other minutes to turn others. Oh, before I let you go, let me make sure of it that I have not simply been hitting at present-day problems, and too much showing forth my own strong thoughts and strong convictions, and preaching too much out of my own experience, which has been perhaps one-sided, and preaching too little out of the calm balance of the Book of God. Before I let you go, let me utter this word in your hearing, from an old Puri-

tan. That old Puritan has said a strange sentence. "Brethren," he says, "take a look out of your graves." It can be done: in imagination, run forward a little bit to the grave; it is not a long run. Imagine yourself dead and buried and gone; and, whether you have left a big hole in society, and in the Church, and in business circles, or whether you have gone unknown and unnoticed, take a look out of your grave after you are dead and buried, *and see how the world wags on without you.* Lift up your head, see how it is getting on without you; and to-day, learn in time, lest you curse yourself through all eternity for your folly;—"Love not the world." A look out of your grave will be enough to save you from its power. Here let us, by simple faith in the unseen Christ of God, enter upon the true, the eternal life. May God bless His Word.



# Regent Square Pulpit.

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THE WOMAN AT THE WELL.

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## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

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TEXT—John iv. 1 to 29.

NOTICE how simply and naturally this greatest of all supernatural events happens. For the greatest of all supernatural events to me is that Christ should come into saving contact with me—that the Incarnate Saviour, who is from eternity and to eternity, should come actually within my ken—that His fulness as the Saviour should come into contact with all my emptiness and need as the poor darkened sinner. That is to me the greatest of all supernatural things. From this incident let us all learn; and especially those of us who do not yet know Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour. Be delivered from vain imaginings, and understand that in very quiet, natural, and homely ways this Heavenly Saviour makes Himself known. Jesus being wearied with His journey, we read, sat thus on the well; and thereby hangs this tale—a tale that will stand the telling as long as audiences gather round the Book of God, and preachers preach the heavenly marvels that are contained within its boards.

“There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water : Jesus saith unto her, Give Me to drink”—in a quiet, natural, homely way like that ; He sitting there, she coming down for an earthly purpose, He there for an eternal purpose. At first she knew nothing about it. He entered into conversation with her, taking her on her own low level ; but He led her onward and forward, until at last He revealed Himself in all His glorious personality as the Messiah to her needy soul. He found her away up at the North Pole of icy indifference to religion, and especially to Him, and His mission among men. He caught her with guile. By a holy craft of speech He led her farther and farther south, until at last she reached a fairly tropical region of spiritual anxiety and desire ; and then He said, “I that speak unto thee am the Messiah.” So, to-night, my dear friends, you have come in here to this “well of ordinances,” as the old preachers used to say, and Christ Jesus is here.

You have come in simply a worldling among worldlings. Up till this hour—shall we say?—the world has satisfied you. At any rate, you have known nothing better than the world’s work and the world’s wages. To speak of you religiously, I am not censorious when I say that the mere form of religion has satisfied you. The great encouragement to me to take up this story is that to-night—this very night, in Regent Square Church—the Lord Himself will take up some dark, dead sinner, or some dreary formalist in religion, He will talk to your heart, He will waken up your curiosity, He will deepen your interest ; and between this and the end of the sermon, He will so have dealt with you that there will be dawning upon that dark soul a light, *the* light that never was on sea or land, “the light of the knowledge of the glory

of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Will God's people pray while I preach?

Jesus said to the woman, as He says to you, "Give Me to drink." That is to say, He took speech. He came into this world of brazen-faced sinners, and yet He finds in it a strange bashfulness. When God comes He has to break the silence.

If Christ had not spoken in this seventh verse, this narrative of mercy had ended ere it was well begun. For not only was He unknown to her in the high claim with which He came among men, but He seemed to be a Jew, and she was a Samaritan. Therefore there was a double estrangement—reason upon reason why this narrative should stop just there. He was there, and sat down on the well, a Jew. She came to draw water. She lowered her bucket, and filled it, and would have gone away. But the Lord said, "Give Me to drink." And I wish to say here to-night, with all simplicity, we are dealing with the same Saviour still. He comes and speaks to you. He knows how far out of it you are, as regards your present position, and as regards your desires. He knows that you do not know Him. He knows that you do not care about Him. He knows how wicked you are, or that you are a mere formalist in religion, and do not want to go farther. But He knows His own errand, He knows His own purpose; and His purpose here is to meet with you and save you. Therefore He takes speech in hand. And as He did then, so He does now. He humbles Himself, and stoops down, that He may look into your worldly eyes, and say, "Give Me to drink." How skilful! Otherwise, I say, you would not have had another verse of this fascinating narrative. The river would have lost itself in the sand, and

you would have seen no more of it. "Give Me to drink," said He.

So the Lord Jesus Christ stands among us to-night, and He virtually says to us, "Poor sinner, refresh Me." "Sinner," He says, "I am weary. Although I be the Saviour crowned in the glory, still I am a wayfaring Man among the sons of men. Still My glory is veiled and dim." Sinner, it is in your power to refresh the heart of the Son of Man as He travels in the greatness of His strength, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.

"Then saith the woman of Samaria, How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a Samaritan?" and she either said, or it is John's comment, "for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." That was a poor speech, was it not? Dear me! Jews drink water, don't they? Jews may be very bad creatures, but they need a drink, and they should get it. No matter who He was; no matter what He was; that was no time and place for starting antipathies of blood and history and creed, was it? That was a shameful speech. *And from a woman!* My sister, not only you, but all of us, have stood on that woman's feet, and spoken by her senseless tongue many a time. God grant that we are getting wiser now. "How is it that Thou, being a Jew?" When the Son of God came as human as He could come—as human as humanity could make Him, and asked for a drink, He did not get it—not all at once. When He comes to you and me He gets the same treatment. It is a good thing that insults are just as they are taken. You cannot insult a man who will not let you. I will defy you to insult a man who will bow his head and not seem to see the insult. And I wish to say, with all earnestness, to some here to-night that you are still alive



and getting another chance ; you are still in the land of the living, and in the place of hope ; you have still an opportunity to meet with this Saviour, as He goes about the roadsides of time, on His way to eternity and the judgment-seat ;—you are still out of the hell you deserve to be in, simply because He is not like any of the sons of men whose patience you have ever tried. *He does not choose to be insulted* by your indifference, and by your ungenerous treatment of Him, even since you have got dimly to know who He is, and the interest for you that lies His way. To change the figure of our story to another metaphor of His own—still in patience He stands, saying, “ Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me.” It is an increasing wonder to me as a preacher that the utterance of the text does not strike open some doors—the mere utterance of it.

“ Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.” The woman’s curiosity is wakened up. He knows with whom He is dealing. He does not need that any should tell Him what is in man, for He knows what is in man. You are a shut door to me. The door is shut and barred, and the window-shutter too. I can make nothing of you. But you are face to face with One who knows every turn and twist in you—every one. He knows the bias you have. He knows every spring in your being, and He can go round and give them all a touch in five minutes. Now on the conscience, now on the reason, now here, now there. Ah ! this blessed Saviour knows us, and He tries all the doors that are round about this temple of

the human heart, if by any means He may get in at any of them. In the case of this woman, He wakens up her curiosity. That is one of His commonest ways. Instead of giving her an angry word back again—instead of saying to *her* what I have said *about her*, He said not a word of that kind, but “If thou knewest who I am”—and He was looking His best—“if thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink, thou wouldest have asked, and He would have given thee living water.” And the bait took. The fish rose to that fly. At once she broke out and said, “Thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence hast Thou this living water?”

I trust that to-night the blessed Saviour by His Spirit is drawing you, and is teaching you, and speaking to you in the same way. My friend, what is wrong with you is this: you are an agnostic, but of a different kind from those who claim that high-sounding name. *You do not know.* You are away from Christ, either in the wilds of wickedness, or scepticism, or of mere formalism in religion, because you do not know. “*If thou knewest* the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him.” You would leap to the occasion. God grant that you may not jump too late! for, as surely as that hour on the clock has come, so surely the judgment-day is coming; and in that hour, when the dread morning breaks, you shall know, too late, that at His side were fountains of living water, and you refused to ask, and refused to drink. If you knew, you would ask, and you would get. There is the whole problem stated, and the solution given.

The woman was wakened up, and she said, “Thou hast

nothing to draw, and the well is deep: from whence hast Thou this living water? Art Thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?" I think that here she felt a little that, as a Jew, Christ thought, as all the Jews thought about the Samaritans, that she was but an ignorant creature. Therefore she would be saying to herself, "Oh, they are all like that. I am sorry I spoke to Him. You cannot speak to a Jew five minutes, but he is trying to lift himself above you. I am ignorant; I am a 'Samaritan devil'"—for that was the common expression for a Samaritan, and Jews had a whole-hearted contempt for the hopeless mixey-maxey of truth and error that formed the Samaritan's creed. Yet He said a strange thing about the living water, and He had not spoken in the usual cursing language of His countrymen. So she said, "Art Thou greater than our father Jacob?" as much as to say, "Do not take me for an ignorant know-nothing. I know the Bible. I could conduct you over this region, and show you all the places of interest. I could tell you about this well. Art Thou greater than our father Jacob?" And she went back upon ancient history to show how much she knew. "He gave us this well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle."

When I was speaking a little while ago about spiritual ignorance, you were trying to get off on this tangent—that I spoke about general ignorance. I do no such thing. You may be well read: you may know the "hundred best books;" you may be a wide reader; and yet *you may be awfully ignorant*. Some poor shouting creature to-night in a Salvation Army meeting, down at the East End, is a king for knowledge compared with you. Last night, it may

be, at twelve o'clock he was swept out of a public-house with the sweepings, into the same gutter; but to-night he is rejoicing in Christ's salvation, and he is miles ahead of you. He has got a something into his mind—a something into his intellect which will grow. He has begun to know Him whom to know is life for the mind for ever and for ever. "This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

"Jesus answered and said to her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst:"—and now you see her eyes opening—"but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. The woman said unto Him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." I should have said that myself. I hardly need the Bible for that verse. I should have said the same, I do believe, if I had been there. So would you; and I trust that you are saying it now, especially those who came in ignorant, with that peculiar ignorance which the Bible dares to tax the wisest of us with, and which it proves—which is worse. You have heard of the man who was in a great rage because somebody called him a liar; and a person said to him, "Oh, never mind if he only *called* you a liar." "Oh, but," the man said, "*he proved it.*" That is the worst of it. The Bible taxes us with ignorance, and then proves it. That is why some people cannot stand it. Now, where are we now? I trust, where the woman was, springing up like her into something of reality, beginning dimly to see: "Oh, there is an interest to me in this Jew. There is something that I would greatly like, and which it is in this Man's power to give me." And I trust that some

of us are just beginning to say like this woman, only in different words—in our own words—“Yes, preacher, we have been beginning to think of late that the Christian has the best of it.” Many people have come that same road, and I trust that you will come further. You say, “I am beginning to think that the Christian has the best of it,” just as the woman might have said, “What a relief it would be to me if I had what this Man has to give me, and never needed to come here trudging to this well any more. The half of my time is spent in trudging to this well and back again.” “Yes,” you say—and of late it breaks upon you more and more—“Oh, if I just had what my Christian father had. He lived and he died on it. He put it down below his dying head, as a pillow, and he rested on it. If I only had the religion that my mother had. If I only had what some young companion of mine says he has gotten, and I think he has, for there is a big difference in him. If I only had what they have got, it would make a big difference in me.” Ay, God bless you, you are right. So it would. It would make a big difference if you had what Christ has to give. You would jump at it, if you understood it, and say, “Give me this living water.” Is it not a fine thing to be saved? Is it not a grand thing to have a fountain in you? I ask you, worldlings, who have gone to slake your thirst at streams of earthly delight, is it not a grand thing to be independent of them and their brackish waters? Is it not a fine thing to be saved? And it is a great reality.

And then, of course, Christ gave it to her. You know the strange story. It is worth watching all the turnings of it. There seems to have been a kind of game of contraries. First of all, He wanted a drink, and He did not get it; and

now she wants a drink, and she does not get it. "Give me this water." And then He says, "Go, call thy husband to come also," instead of giving her at once the thing she asked. Some of us need to have that preached to us, do we not? Salvation is easy. Well, yes, it is easy, for all Divine work is done with Divine ease; and yet, as regards my actual experience of being saved—being brought from darkness to light, from emptiness to conscious feeling and fulness, I am made to confess that it is not just so easy. It is coming, and I am coming at it, but not just with a careless, unconscious ease. "Go, call thy husband to come hither. She said, I have no husband. And Jesus said, Thou hast well said, I have no husband; for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly." This old, old story the Lord must go through with all of us. "*What about your sin?*" This question discovers to us that this woman was a sinner. I do not know how to put the question to you with Christ's own adroitness, so that it will find you out. But He knows, and in that judgment-day of which I am continually warning you, we shall all find out about you, what is common property about that poor woman. Not the same sin. Oh, I never said so; but *sin*, that deep, damning thing, will be discovered on your skirts, and spread like dung upon your face. Sin, your sin, which you buried and hid, trying to palm off yourself as being something other than a sinner, needing to be washed and saved like sinners generally. And the only way for outwardly decent or indecent people to save themselves from that awful day, is to do what this woman did—blurt out the truth before God. Stand before Him and admit it, as she did. "I have no husband." And



He answered, "You have said well." That is something from Christ. That is the beginning of hope for this woman.

"You have said well, that you have no husband: for you have had five; and he whom you now have is not your husband: in that saidst thou truly." It was said of Him, long before He came, that He would not quench the smoking flax, or break the bruised reed. If that question had been sprung upon her by any other Jew, do you think that she would have said, "I have no husband." Do you think that she would have come near to anything like what could be turned into a confession of sin? No; but already she was beginning to feel, "This is the strangest man in Jewish gaberdine that ever I spoke to." She was right. She, too, would say afterwards, as the two disciples on the road to Emmaus said, "Did not my heart burn within me while He talked with me by the way?" Have you never come there, my friend? Ah, then, how little you know with all your knowledge. Her face burned with a deeper red, and her eyes went down, as she said, falteringly, "I have no husband." That is the point to which Christ comes with us to-night, and some of us are inclined to argue it with Him. This woman did not. Some of us are inclined to turn round fiercely and say, "Do not tax me with that bad name, or that bad thing. I will never allow it." Well, *it is the question of the Bible*—husband or adulterer? Which? You want to say, "No, not adulterer. This is legitimate. This is lawful." And Christ dares calmly to step back to every soul that is away from Him and away from God, and to point to what is keeping you back. Your sin, at bottom, is spiritual fornication and adultery—the heart going after some object other than Jesus Christ, who has a right, and the only right, to all its

love and to all its allegiance. Argue it as we may, and fiercely as we may, that is how He puts it. And in that contention in the end He is bound to win.

“The woman said, I perceive that Thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” I think that when she said that she was just like many of us still. In this wonderful conversation between Him and her, which was reaching into her conscience, He was virtually telling her, “My good woman, before I can fill your heart with living water, the dirty water must be emptied out.” And that is coming too near her, and she says, “I perceive that Thou art a prophet.” And she wanted to start the old futile discussion between Jews and Samaritans, as to which of them was right about the temple. Just like some of us. After all my appealing to-night, I fear that before some of you are out from under the shadow of the church, you will say something so hopelessly disappointing, something so wide of the mark! Only those who are keen to detect will understand that, maybe, you are not so indifferent as your casual, cool remark would indicate. You are trying to feign an indifference that is not real. The Lord reach you in these remarks about sin! She wanted to get off, and, although it was but a stray word—shall I say a desperate remark?—the Lord answered it, and He says, “Woman, the hour cometh when thou shalt neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.” As Paul said long afterwards to Timothy, “O Timothy, guard the deposit.” Up to this time “the deposit” was with the Jews as it was with no other people. “Salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, that the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit.”

Oh, think of these glowing, these deep, these wonderful

words, with all their mysterious meaning—words high as heaven, deep as hell, the measure thereof longer than the earth and broader than the sea. And Christ thought it fit and worthy to utter such words in the hearing, first of all, of a woman like this. Surely in the vilest of men and women there is a capacity—and how it makes one want to preach to them!—there is a capacity for taking in God's revelation, if Christ said that to this woman. Here you have the Lord Himself unchurching Himself, keeping clear of the Samaritan temple, and keeping as clear of the Jerusalem temple. He was an unwelcome guest there. Poor Ritualist, listen! Where are you? This is for *you*. You are wanting to go back into temples again, and you are wanting to build religion into hallowed walls and consecrated buildings, and you are wanting to put religion again into the hands of priests and Levites, special men with special clothes, and special names and special functions. It makes us sometimes ask whether we are in a Protestant town. Now, here is our common Lord and Saviour—and it is grand to think of it here in London—taking this Ritualism and tearing it into rags, and flinging it back at us contemptuously, and showing us that there is nothing in it with its names, and millinery, and rags, and flummery—nothing in it. God is a Spirit. Meet with Him now. Scatter the priest and the Levite to right and left, and get to God, and get to do with God at first hand. That is the difference that Christ has made. Here, there, anywhere. God is a Spirit. To-night, in your bedroom, as well as here in the great congregation, or out there at the street corner, or under the street lamp, if you have no secret place to go to, find one there, and enter into the secret place of the tabernacles of the Most High, and dwell under the shadow of Him who is the Almighty.

The woman said to Him, "I know that the Messiah is coming, who is called the Christ: and when He has come, He will tell us all things." I think that this woman wanted to

have the last word. How often you read down through this narrative, "And the woman said unto Him." It is said so often, and so circumstantially, that there must be a meaning in it, and I think that part of the meaning, at any rate, is that it is like us all. We are all, first of all, too silent, and He has to start us, and then, when He starts us, we will never stop until He has to stop us again, and to apply the closure. The woman said unto Him, "I know." I tell you, she did not like to be taxed with ignorance. Neither do any of us. "I know that the Messiah is coming." Everybody knew that. Jew and Samaritan had a dim hope of that kind; for long the Messiah had been coming, and surely He was a little nearer then. "I know that the Messiah is coming, who is called the Christ," she said: "and when He comes, He will settle all the disputes between Jews and Samaritans. He will tell us all things." And she was just going to stoop and fill her pitcher, and go away satisfied that she had got the last word, and had changed the conversation when it took that awkward turn into the conscience. She had got up her hand, at any rate, when Christ fixed her once more with His eye, for this Christ slays more gazers than the basilisk; and He said, "I that speak unto thee am the Messiah." And she said no more, but she looked at Him, no doubt. I can feel a little how she would look.

That woman got a sight that day that told on her for her betterment, and it is telling on her yet. She and the Christ of God changed eyes. They looked into each other's souls, and she said no more because she was thinking more deeply than ever she had done before. "I that speak unto thee am the Messiah." That was a big order—if you will allow the phrase. That was a big demand on that woman's faith—was it not?—just on the spot; but she stood it. She said no more, but she stood it. She said no more, but when she went into the town she spöke. "The woman then left her waterpot, and went into the city, and saith to the men,

Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did : is not this the Christ ? ”

“ Upon this ” came these lumbering disciples, always putting their foot in it, always coming at the wrong time. They might have stayed away a little longer, when they were away so long. Anyway, now when the plot was thickening—now when this woman might have so much to ask, and Christ might have so much to explain—“ upon this came the disciples.” No, there was no interruption. I should think, at any rate, that if there was an interruption, the interruption was as divinely planned as the interview. My sermon comes to an end, but there is no interruption. The clock does not interrupt it, and yet it says, “ You must go.” My hearer, *if you have seen Christ*, it is time you were away. It is time you were away back to the city, back to those who know you best, back to those who knew you in your sin—away back like an arrow from the string. God speed you back to your friends. Say, “ Come. Come, share with me this cup that God has put to my lips. It is running over. Come, see a Man who told me all things that ever I did, and who forgave me all. Is not this more than man ? Is not this He which was to come ? Is not this the God-Man, the Messiah, the Saviour at last ? ” Away, back. There is no interruption. It is time that you were away. No testimony so swift and vivid as the testimony of the soul that is just beginning to open with the knowledge of Divine things. How vastly the Church has lost because she has not used the ringing testimony of new-born souls. We have gagged them, and quieted them, and said, “ Now, before you dare speak, you must come and get a great deal of instruction ; ” and we ram them and cram them with instruction, and make them stiff with knowledge, so that they cannot move at all. We need this word. She went. This woman knew that she was a poor creature to begin with ; but in the end of that narrative—and I want to say this to the Christian

people here—in the end of that narrative she is worth a score of you. I say it to your faces. She is worth a score of some of you for Christ's purpose. Christ thought that that woman was worth the saving, and she *was* worth the saving. She was a rare woman. She is an "elect lady," as John would say. My sister, my decent young brother, my moral friend, in the great day, when it comes, if we find a woman like this shut in, and our decent selves out, we shall simply know then that the true woman has got in, and that the real sinner has got a place outside. Never forget that for a moment.

Now, where are we? Do we know this Christ, and are we beginning to live for His glory? This Christ is worth talking about. Oh, who that has seen Him can be silent about Him? "Come, see a Man." Go and tell about Him, and as you think of Him, and try to tell of Him to another, He will be magnified to your own eyes; and it is wonderful what you will have to say. I often think that just here comes in beautifully what the bride in the Song of Solomon says. It seems to be the language of rapture and ecstasy. How it would come pouring from this woman's lips, if afterwards she got to know it. "Come, see a Man." Who is this Man? Do you want to know Him and to describe Him? Go away back to the Song of Solomon. "My beloved is white and ruddy; his locks are bushy, and black as the raven; his countenance is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His fingers are like rings which are set with the beryl. His body is like bright sapphires overlaid with ivory. His legs are like pillars of marble set upon sockets of fine gold. His mouth is most sweet; yea, He is altogether lovely." *This is the Man* who has entered into union with me for all eternity. Have you seen Him? Have you known Him? And if you have seen Him and known Him, how can you be silent about Him? "Spring up, spring up, O well!"



# Regent Square Pulpit.

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## THE OVERTHROW OF JERICHO

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### A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

TEXT—Joshua vi. and Heb. xi. 30.

IN order to bind together the teaching of this chapter, we might put as a headline over the narrative that summing up of its pith and meaning which we have in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the writer says, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days."

Faith is a plant of Divine planting and of Divine growth. It is, however, planted in a strange, churlish, uncongenial soil, and sometimes it suffers not a little from its environment. Sometimes it seems to wither away until it almost disappears from above ground; at other times it revives and brings forth its wonderful fruits to God's glory and praise. Now, on this occasion that precious thing, that only Divine thing in the heart of man, faith in God, was in splendid condition, in lively and vigorous exercise. Therefore this

mighty deed of renown was accomplished. For lack of a strong, simple faith in God this very deed took so long to accomplish.

Forty years before this God brought this people's fathers to this same point, and to this very opportunity, but faith in Him was at such a very low ebb that this deed could not be done. God had to fling them away back from the frontier into the desert, and lead them up and down here and there for forty years until their carcasses fell in the wilderness. He got them comfortably packed away under the clod, and at last raised up out of their sons a more faithful generation to serve Him and to do His work. Yes, it was by faith, and faith working at what we might call revival heat, revival pressure and power. And one great and good result of that comes out in the very first verse of the thrilling dramatic narrative which we have read together. One effect of faith in God, operating in the hearts of His people at its true, real strength, is that it produces a great separation. It causes a great separation between God's people and the world. You remember that we read, "Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in." There is a great deal in that. Ah, instinctively those enemies of Israel felt whenever they saw that new generation of warriors come up against them, "These men are not as their fathers." I can imagine that when the *sough* of that strange, mysterious band of people who had been creeping along the edge of the desert, so wonderfully guided and so wonderfully fed, reached the people of Jericho, and when at last they them-

selves began to heave in sight, old men in Jericho would be saying to younger braves, "Be not afraid of them. These men's fathers came up against us, but when they saw the height of our walls, and the height of ourselves, their hearts melted within them like water, and we have seen nothing of them for almost a lifetime. Be not afraid of them." But they were wrong. I can imagine other men, who had been out doing the work of scouts and spies, saying as they gathered round their fires in Jericho and talked about the host that was on the way, "Ah, say not so. Whatever these men's fathers were, we have been out and seen the sons." They had perhaps been hovering round the Israelitish camp when that was witnessed which Sir Walter Scott has so graphically described—

"When Israel, of the Lord beloved,  
Out from the land of bondage came,  
Her father's God before her moved,  
An awful guide in smoke and flame.  
By day along the astonished lands  
The cloudy pillar glided slow,  
By night Arabia's crimson sands  
Returned the fiery pillar's glow."

And then, perhaps, they had seen and heard the whole host worshipping God,—

"When rose the choral hymn of praise,  
And trump and timbrel answered keen;  
And Zion's daughters poured their lays  
With priests' and warriors' voice between."

The spies had seen and heard that, and no doubt they went back to Jericho and said, "Shut your gates! Man the walls! It is death or victory this time." There was something uncanny about the men and women who could so sing

praise to an invisible God. And the advice was taken. Jericho was straitly shut up. They considered it no laughing matter this time. They felt instinctively, "These people are determined to prove themselves strong, where their fathers were weak and failed." That is always one immediate result. Only let God's truth, in power, come into the Church's heart, and this immediate triumph will be secured. Jericho will be straitly shut up. There will be a splendid division and separation, with a clear field and issue of conflict definitely presented—all Jericho *there*, and all Israel *here*, and the ground cleared in front for the contending hosts.

But to-day, where are we? We do not know what is Jericho, and what is Israel. We are all here and there; all mixed, hopelessly, helplessly. It would need a man with a microscope, and even he would fail to detect an Israelite in many cases; and as long as that is so, depend upon it, Jericho will be there in all her insulting might, laughing at us to our faces. But let us come near to God, as these Israelites after forty shameful years did. Let us at last cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils, either to praise Him or to fear Him. Let us draw near to the unseen power in our midst, the Lord Himself, the Ark of the Covenant. Let us gather round Him. Let us lift up our hearts in faith and prayer to Him. Then He will revive us, and this immediate sign will follow: the world will stop scoffing, the world will stop insulting. The world, that is now through its ordinary channels of utterance showering contempt upon Christ's feeble, feckless, and seemingly use-

less Church, will change its tone, and say, "This Church of Christ means business. She is girding herself for real conflict with stalwart, stubborn Jericho. O for those old times back again, when faith in God binds God's people together, and instinctively makes the fear and terror of a revived Church to fall upon her enemies! The battle is about won when you have secured that. Fear and terror which forty years before paralyzed Israel is now reversed, and has fallen upon and is paralyzing Jericho. For, after all, it is the state of the heart that wins the battle, and in the case of these Israelites, "Their strength was as the strength of ten, because their hearts were pure." They were coming to this business in simple whole-hearted confidence in God. Therefore they were virtually irresistible.

But then notice still further, that this was a victory won, of course, by faith, but at the same time by *faith working through organization*—if I may use a term that has got to be somewhat depressing. Certainly it is depressing to my mind. The cry on every hand is, "Organize, organize, organize!" I think that there is a little too much said about organization. Still, we must not despise it, and we must not forget that God is not the God of confusion, but of order. God does His work by plan and system. So here, we find faith working by plan, and system, and organization. In order to know that, you have simply to remember what we read out of the chapter. First of all, there was the Ark of the Lord in the centre, the armed men in their place, the priests going before, and blowing with the trumpets. That was not a mob; that was not a horde; it was not a mere

mass of people, every man doing what was right in his own eyes. You say, many men, many minds. True; but not in this army, or any army. Many men, *one mind*, there. The Ark of the Covenant was the centre, and by the mouth of Joshua, His appointed servant, Jehovah was giving direction and tone to the whole movement—

“Not a step was out of tune,  
As the tides obey the moon.”

On they went round about the doomed city. It is an exhilarating spectacle to see their splendid order; how grandly, how unswervingly, as a single man, they marched to final victory. And it leads us to say this about organization. By all means let us have organization, if it is to mean organization of living men and women. If you mean the organization of people who are not making organization an end in itself, but who are looking to God in Christ with clear, open, honest eyes and hearts, and therefore are falling each into his due and proper place, *then* you cannot have too much organization. But the half of our organization to-day is utterly miscalled. It is doing no good whatever. In vain do you organize a church if the life of God—sterling simple faith—has gone out of men's hearts. You are only flogging a dead horse. And a great part of our conferring to-day, our getting up new plans and new methods, comes to nothing, and deserves to come to nothing; because the object seems to be to organize—that is, to devise some new trick, some new plan of our own which will grip Jericho's walls by the roots, and



scatter them along the ground, *without compelling us to sheer unadulterated faith in God Almighty.*

My dear friends, I do not know how it is with you, but with me the most difficult thing that ever I tried to organize myself to do was simply to believe in the unseen Lord of Hosts. It may be easy for you, but I rather think that the more you gird yourself for it, the more you find that the real difficulty of all organized movement lies there—to get the Lord in His place, and to get ourselves each in our right and proper place round about Him. That is the true organization; and to-day the Church seems to be pretty far from finding out this secret. There it is in working order at Jericho; no stone in the machine, no grinding, no heating of any of the bearings, but everything working with delightful swiftness, and ease, and splendid momentum, when the striking moment came. Because faith in God was strong in the people's hearts; therefore the organization was divinely simple and gloriously successful. Organize yourself, my brother. Organize yourself, my sister. Do not be alarmed or unduly depressed by this word—again I say a word of somewhat ominous import to-day—organize.

I remember when I began first to serve the Lord Jesus Christ this word frightened me. I began to serve Him in a congregation out of which, for various reasons, the spiritual life and tone had somewhat evaporated. I remember the grey-bearded elderly Christian men coming to me, and saying in their wise way—it simply put the heart out of me, and sent my spirits down below zero—“Now, friend, what

you have got to do is this. We are in a very backward state undoubtedly, and there is a great deal to be done, and if you could organize a band of Christian workers"—Yes, if I could have made them out of the stones of the street, I might have had them. But when I came round and tried to organize my advisers, I found out a few things. I was to go and work up some trick; not to be a worker for God, but some kind of artful dodger who would find out some way by which Jericho's walls might be overthrown, and the victory got for God's sorely pressed and baffled evangel without that faith in God which evermore involves separation and consecration. I am putting it sharply with an unmistakable edge for all of us. Let us feel the edge of it to the very quick.

Already you have noticed the details of that organization—the Ark of the Lord in the centre; the priests going on before and blowing those trumpets. Ah, surely that organization, like all true organization in God's Church, either then or since, was meant, my dear Christian friends, to humble our pride, to weaken our false strength, and to bring us to depend entirely on an arm and a wisdom stronger than our own. I often think of that host. I often try in studying this passage to remember that this really happened, that it is not a myth—not a fable, but that during one week of special effort of God's Church never to be forgotten, real flesh and blood men like ourselves—men who wore their heads above their shoulders like you and me, men who were fairly rational and intelligent, got this task set them by the Lord our God, both theirs and ours. What task?

This, that they, men of valour, men of war, men with a city to capture which was filled with their enemies, and which barred their progress to the Land of Promise, had to take that city, not by might, not by power, not by military skill, but in such a way as poured contempt upon military strategy and the prowess of the individual arm or mind. Do not imagine that that was a simple thing. Do not let any believer here, for example, hang his head and blush for shame because such a stupid, unintellectual old story is to be found in this museum of antiquities called the Bible. Do you not feel a little blush creeping over your cheek? You go back to-morrow to your business office, and a young fellow says, "Did you go to church yesterday?" and you say, "Yes." He smiles at that a little contemptuously, and then he says, "Well, what was he talking about?" And then you say, "It was that story about Jericho's walls falling down;" and at once the mocking laugh breaks forth, "Aha! did you really go and listen to that? How can you take your intellect with you and listen even to the reading of the story, much less hear a sermon based upon it?" Do you not wish that God had, so to speak, remembered that the nineteenth century was coming, and not made it so desperately hard for us to hold faith in Him and in His Word, as recorded in this Book, against all the pride and intellectual power of the time? Ah, God knew that it was coming, and God wishes you and me to go through the same crucifixion of intellectual pride and vanity that these old Israelites had to go through. It was not an unintellectual thing to walk seven days silently

round about that city. In spirit, try it, and the more your spirit bends itself to enter into that scene, and to go round that march, the more you feel that it was not irrational and stupid ; but it was something that taxed to the utmost all the moral, spiritual, intellectual, and physical energies that compose man. I can imagine stalwart, grimy Israelites, after they had come in from that first day's work of walking round about those walls, drying the perspiration from their brows, and flinging themselves down in their tents utterly exhausted, and saying, " I would rather face the enemies of my God and race, ten to one, in open fight, than go that round. It has taken more out of me than the largest share of hacking and hewing that ever I did for Israel in my life." I am convinced—I feel it better than I can express—that in this march God set them after this fashion because He wished to test them sheer down to the ground :—" Now, have you faith in Me? Yes or no? Your fathers had not. Have you?" And, by His grace, they were able, without saying it, but by doing the thing, to show that they had.

My young brother, do not blush because you are a man of faith, but rather try to make the other man blush because he is not, and always hold this position—that faith in God, even when it seems to be utterly beyond our ideas, is sublimely rational and intellectual. It is scarce in the world, and scarce in our own day, not because of great powers of mind, but for want of them. If we had more faith we should have less conceit of ourselves, and we should be grander, bigger, broader-browed, and warmer-hearted men, both for God and our fellows, than unfortunately we

are. A shrivelling, narrowing, withering thing is unbelief. I know that it is mightily praised out yonder in the world. As I said here in our evangelistic meetings more than once, unbelief is mightily praised in excellent prose, and still more excellent poetry; but it never looks well in the Bible. It always looks here to be a blear-eyed, dull, stupid kind of thing; and faith in God always looks grand, something more than mortal and more than human. And it is the same still. Do not blush, dear friend, for the sixth of Joshua. If you blush be this your shame, that this faith in God, this sublime faith of these men of old, seems to be so far beyond you. Ah, those were big men. Little men could not have done this. I can imagine a small breed of Israelites—men far too like ourselves—who on the first day's round would have given vent to what we call "the rationalizing spirit," and they would have said to their fellows, "Now, really, being Israelites has led us along some strange paths, but I will draw the line at this. As intelligent, sensible men, what mortal connection can there be between our walking round the walls with all this horn-blowing and tooting and the down-coming of these walls?" And do not the rationalists seem to have a deal to say for themselves? But when I put it that way, you see how stupid it would have been, judged by the after results. Always let us believe that faith in God is splendidly intelligent. Yes, and I think it was partly to stop the rationalistic spirit that Joshua issued this item of his plan of campaign. See verse 10 of the chapter in the Book of Joshua: "Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise

with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout : then shall ye shout." What did he mean by that adoption of the closure so very thoroughly ? Well, I think he meant to stop what I have been speaking of, in your heart and mine. He meant to muzzle and gag the rationalists. He meant to muzzle all doubters and those who were of weak faith. If he had allowed these men to go tramping around the walls, and talking to each other about the unreasonableness of this, you can see how the want of faith would have spread. There would have been a rebellion ; men would have utterly abandoned the business, and again God's purposes for themselves and for mankind would have been held back for another generation.

And let me say, further, if any of us have doubts--and just because we are human we have them--let us adopt Joshua's plan. If you have doubts, my friend, keep them to yourself. Do not give them to me. I have plenty of my own, and I will try and keep mine back from you. That is a grand plan for doubts. Shut the mouth upon them. Let them be hermetically sealed. Do not let them get the fresh air, and they will very likely wither and die. But go away and spread them, open your mouth, and talk, talk, talk, talk, until we are tired of hearing about your doubts and your fears and your head-waggings, and you will spread that dismal spirit, and bring upon all those with whom you come in contact that weariest of all blights, a lack of faith in the force of God's own Word. After those men went that march for a whole day, compelled to hold their



tongues, I can imagine, again, that when they came home, when the day's march was over, and all the Israelites were unmuzzled, men would be saying, "Well, I frankly admit that, when we began the day, I had grave doubts about this; but after this day I feel them no more." I think that one brother would say to another, "God is breaking me down—utterly pulverizing all my own notions, and He is building me up on a new foundation and plan altogether. *As surely as God lives*, we are going to do a big thing if we will just hold on. I feel that we are going to do a deed at which the generations of men shall stand surprised while time holds on its course, if we go on as we have begun." Oh, for that silence to-day! Silence! No talking in the ranks! If you cannot shout a word of faith, for shame's sake hold your peace. No talking! No ventilating of your petty, peddling scepticisms and unbelief. But this rule also would tell for good upon quite a different class of men—I mean the mere enthusiasts. The "small-pot-soon-hot" kind of Israelites; who would have wasted themselves with hallelujahs to-day, and then refused to go their round when its monotony became severe and prolonged. Steady, then, my comrades in arms. Let us keep equally clear of rationalistic criticism, and senseless empty shouting and hurraing, miscalled enthusiasm. In times like these, silence may be truest praise. It is time for silence. Less talking, and more walking. Less conferring with men, and more simple, sublime, stupendous faith in the Word of God. God has spoken, and God has sworn, "I will give Jericho into your hands, and its mighty men

of valour. Believe in Me." And it turned out that that was the highest wisdom. And, last of all, we see an organization that was gloriously successful.

On the seventh day they compassed the city seven times; and, as surely as God had spoken the word, the deed was done. He kept them from ventilating their doubts. He compelled them to look to Him, and to trust in Him. He poured contempt on all their wisdom and all their strength, so that their unbelief just withered away at the root, and died out in their hearts because it had nothing to feed upon.

And God Almighty rose, and swelled more and more on their view day by day, until at last, I almost think, those men themselves physically swelled and grew bigger. God had come to them and filled them, so that at last when Joshua did unmuzzle them, and say, "Shout, for the Lord has given you the city," from those thousands of pent-up hearts there went forward a great wave which, as the original suggests, carried the walls with it on the upgoing. The walls fell down under it. Under what? Under that shout. There was so much of Almighty God in it, as well as of the pent-up enthusiasm of men, that nothing could resist it. It swept clean to heaven, and carried everything with it on the way. And that is faith in God, from the beginning to the end. I wish I had the tongues of men and angels to plead with this audience gathered here to-day. If the spirit of this did fall upon you and me, we could go out and yet shake London's Damnation to its centre. You people who are here—the men and women who are here—could make this world's wickedness rock and reel, if only,

as old Dr. Chalmers used to say, we were “men of wecht”—men of weight—men filled and flooded, made strong and solid with more than mortal wisdom and more than mortal strength.

To-day, where are we? Just where the Israelites were; still, after all that has come and gone, only on the borders. The world still needs to be taken captive for Jesus Christ. In our own land here, look at the stubborn, entrenched forms of wickedness. They have always been, and they are saying, “We will always be.” In heathen lands, surely, we are just on the borders. Hoary systems of Hinduism and superstition and degrading idolatry of every kind have yet virtually to be besieged and attacked; and before we can do anything, we must follow this Divine plan and procedure. The first thing, dear friends, is to get our own hearts, our own selves united—united round the Lord, and then knit together to each other as one man. You will always find in Scripture that, when God’s people get united round about Him, nothing can stand before them. Here they were united, and Jericho fell without a stroke. Come away down the stream of time some two thousand years, and I will show you the same thing again. It is no longer Jericho, but it is Jerusalem; and on this occasion, to which I am referring, Jerusalem is the headquarters of the devil’s camp, even as Jericho was in the story on which we are discoursing. How does God bring down the power of Jerusalem in which Satan is so greatly entrenched? They have done their crowning deed of wickedness. They have actually killed God’s Son. How does He do? He gathers into one the

scattered Church in that city—one hundred and twenty men and women—against all the power of the enemy, God organized them. God gathered those one hundred and twenty men and women and organized them, with Himself in the midst. He sent upon them the power and pressure of the Holy Ghost. And what took place? Satan's seat lay open to the mercy of God's covenant people, and three thousand souls were the slain of the Lord in one day! Our time is gone. We can but utter one closing cry—"Return, O Lord, to the many thousands of Israel." Amen.



# Regent Square Pulpit.

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HOW LITTLE WILL DO! "SHE ONLY  
TOUCHED."

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## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

I AM to speak from an incident in the chapter we read — the 5th of Mark. I read the story of the demoniac, the man possessed of the legion of devils; but I am going to preach on the healing of the woman who had so long been suffering from secret wasting sickness. I cannot preach from both at once, although it would be interesting to lay these subjects alongside of each other, making the madman a type of the reckless, wicked, out-and-out sinner, and this poor pallid creature a type of quite another kind. Thus should we see how wonderfully the Lord Jesus Christ can adapt His grace to extreme cases, as also to all the grades that lie between such extremes. The most widely opposite contrasts are all equally easy; and lie within the scope of His power and love. Let us get the record of this woman in our minds. Read from the 25th verse:—

"And a certain woman who had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse. When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched His garment" [the tassel very likely at the end of the flowing robe]. "For she said, If I may touch but His clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up ; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus immediately knowing in Himself that virtue had gone out of Him, turned Him about in the press, and said, Who touched My clothes? And His disciples said unto Him, Thou seest the multitude thronging Thee, and sayest Thou, Who touched Me? And He looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before Him, and told Him all the truth. And He said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole ; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague."

Now, look at that woman and at THAT MAN, and remember that all these miracles of healing are parables of grace. Each, in its own way, is a sermon about salvation, not from bodily disease, but from the malady of sin in your soul and mine ; each, in its own way, reveals Jesus as the Great Physician. He is able to do for you what no doctor can do. That which is the root and spring of all trouble—your sinful nature, namely—He can heal. Christ can save ; and faith in Him is the channel through which the healing virtue flows. 'Tis a trite remark ; indeed it is. We *have* heard something like it before. But maybe, through the blessing of God, the commonplaces of sin and grace may fall with new meaning on some mad or sad, some demented or dejected sinner here. Look at the woman, I say, as here described. If you want to find an incident particularly well pictured, go to Mark's Gospel. Here is the woman, and you think you can



almost hear her heavy sighs. Look at the wasted creature; think what she was twelve years before—quite likely one of the fairest of Israel's daughters; at least, so we may think of her. Twelve years ago she was, perhaps, in opening womanhood—young and bright and gay. Life's doors of hope and promise were opening before her, just as they opened before ourselves when we were in our morning manhood and womanhood. Suddenly there came this weary blight, with its drain upon the body, its deep and deepening dejection to the spirit, and, pretty much as if she had been a leper, its shame and "separation." She was "unclean." One doctor was tried, and then another; but as the weary years rolled on hope died away, and now there was nothing before her but the opening grave, not very far ahead.

But enough of sadness. For, oh, I like to think that all through those twelve years she was being prepared unconsciously for Christ. She was not ripening for the grave; she was ripening for Jesus. If you had afterwards gone and said to her that through those twelve years she was growing to her grave, she would have contradicted you. "I thought that once, myself," she would have said; "and if there had been no Jesus, no Incarnate Saviour born into the world in my own day and generation, I would have perished ere the prime: but His coming has made all the difference. I was ripening for *Him*, bless His holy name." Let me at the very beginning preach the gospel of hope. I may be speaking to some sad, almost despairing sinner, but I dare to say to you now, "Don't despair; do not begin to say, 'There is no

help for me.' " This woman might well have said so, and yet, oh wonder of wonders, the day came when she and Jesus met together. Her burden was lifted ; she was restored, not only physically, but spiritually to that simple faith in the Blessed Redeemer which brings into the heart Eternal Life.

Now, that is my hope for some of you. If Christ had come past this woman's door twelve years earlier, when she was a fresh, blooming damsel, He might have come and gone, with very little regard from her. So I say of some of you. If I had preached this sermon twelve years ago, let us say, you, although close by, would not have been here to listen. What did you then care for the Gospel ? You were young and healthy, maybe wealthy, and you tossed your head at religion. It might serve for other people ; but not for you. Time might write wrinkles and trace crow's feet on certain faces ; it might bend some backs, and bring to some sickness and poverty ; but all this was far from you. Religion and preachers, they might be all very well for aged, sick, and care-worn people ; they had a very slender interest for you. The pride of life was at its height. But it is otherwise to-night. Twelve years have made a difference. In twelve years this woman bent like other folks ; and for some time back you also are beginning to find out that life is not so rosy and springing as you had imagined. No ; your steps are heavier, your brows more clouded, and the light in your eyes has grown dim. If I had only overheard you, this very day you were heaving great sighs like your sorrowful neighbours. And yet I rejoice to think that, although

painfully disillusionizing, this experience is working itself out to make you ready for Jesus. It enables you to see through the world, so that you may turn from it, and turn to the only help, the only hope that never fails—the Lord Jesus Christ.

You are here to-night because "your strength is weakened in the way, your days of life are shortened." Well, bless God for anything that takes out of us the pride of life, the false strength, and makes us come tottering, at last, to Jesus.

How true to fact is this item: "She had suffered many things of many physicians, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse." If I could only total up the bright money you have paid in order to lift away your weariness, your mortal sickness, that will not shake off! Why, for example, are theatres full in London every night in the week? They are filled to a considerable extent with people who are trying to get rid of a gnawing weariness. They will pay this clown, or that actor, saying, "Make me surmount this secret and growing sadness." They say to this prima donna, "Sing to me, and I will pay much money, if you will drive from my soul, aye, for one hour, this mortal weariness, this ghastly sickness, that is killing all my joy. Rid me of this palsy, this white-facedness, this death begun. 'Ease me of mine adversary.'"

In vain you go into society, or into business, to shake yourself clear; charm the charmers never so wisely, the sigh comes back, the wound is but slightly healed by saying, "Peace, Peace," when there is no peace; and as the

years go steadily plodding on, your heart cries out in sore amaze, "Miserable comforters are ye all: oh, who will show me any good?" You have heard that pitiful story of one of our famous players, Grimaldi, who used to charm thousands by the hour, and make them forget their miseries by his acting. One day there came to a doctor a weary haggard man, who said, "I am so wretchedly heavy and dull that I cannot get cheered up." The doctor examined him: then said, "You are simply melancholy; why not go and hear Grimaldi?" A spasm of intense pain crossed the poor man's face as he said, "Doctor, don't jest with me: I am Grimaldi!"

There is the poor creature; and when you see her so thin, so "shilpit," as they say in Scotland, so drawn together, remember that she is a picture of what your soul is in God's sight. Oh, if your body sitting there were suddenly to shrink to the proportions of your soul, there would be lots of room in that pew! As far as I am stretching now [the preacher stretched out his arms] would hold a score of you. If our bodies were to collapse to the size of the wasted soul that is dying by inches within us, what a miserable spectacle we should present! That woman is a picture of what our spiritual being is like to God, and to all holy and healthy angels. How they must pity us—we are so shrunken by reason of sin.

But now we reach the turn in this long lane: "When she had heard of Jesus, she came." Now, it is easy reading that, but did you notice how much is in it? "*She came,*"—so easy to read it, so hard for some of you to do it. It

is the last thing we do, to come. "When she had heard." If she had been like some of us, she would have said, "Oh, ah, He is come, is He?" And if you had been her neighbour, you would have said, "Rachel dear, you ought to try; He has done wonderful things among us, if all accounts be true." "Oh, but why should I trouble?" "Because, since I knew you first, my good neighbour, you are getting whiter and thinner. When I hear that hollow cough of yours, through the wall at nights, I cannot sleep for the concern it gives me. I think you should try." "Oh, well, may be. I shall see; I'll think about it." That is what she would have done—think about it. And she would have been like some sitting here to-night; when she heard of Jesus, she would have done really nothing. Right on, up to ten minutes to nine to-night, through ten, twenty, thirty, forty years, you have heard, and heard, and heard; but you have never *come* to Christ yet! She was different; when she heard of Jesus, "she came." It was too good a chance to lose; she gave the thing a trial anyway. You see she had something to deliver her from merely asking questions, and resting there; she had that secret trouble with its fear like a spur to send her on. That is what I would like to reach you with. For any sake, be quick, for you are dying, *and the end may come suddenly!* Quickened your pace, hurry your steps to Jesus; it every way becomes you. "When she had heard, she came." I heard of Jesus for a long while, and I came, younger than some of you; but even then I heard of Jesus long before it occurred to me that He might help me, and that I needed Him. But, by-and-bye,

I got to see that my life was being wasted : to put aside all parable, that sin's guilt and shame, and curse and power, had hold of me. And what does it profit, after all, to have even a healthy body for our few years of life. Sin is reigning in us, and in it. Sin will carry us off ; for "death has passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." There is no getting out of it.

Notice, further, that as she came she was saying within herself, "If I may touch but His clothes, I shall be made whole." Thus she came hopefully. She did not come despairingly ; she came encouraging herself. Now, my friend, I wish you would help yourself ; I wish you would come to the Gospel as you have never come before. Pluck up heart of grace. Come with a bright look in the face, not a blank, dull, unexpectant eye. But, like the woman, say to-night, "I believe I will be saved." *Have the very wildest expectations in and from Jesus*, and they will never be falsified ; they will be fulfilled. Was this woman's hope falsified ? She came, saying to herself, "If I may touch but His clothes, I shall be whole." Was that false ? was it not fulfilled to the very letter ? Well, now, poor man, poor woman, young or old, sick or well, if you would only waken up and be hopeful, that hope would surely be fulfilled. Oh, be hopeful about the love and power of Christ ; help Him to save you ; be willing and wishful to be saved ; then *put it all to the touch*, this very moment ! Lord Jesus, I will ; I do—I do now trust in Thee for salvation. Just as you will have it, the Lord will be to you now ; according to your faith or your faithlessness, be it unto you, or be it *not* unto you.



This woman was perhaps a little bewildered as she came; perhaps it was with some thought of magic, or other such means; but still there was this in her heart:—she believed in *Him*, and hoped in Him. Now, do not hope anything in me, nor anything in this mere, bare book; but hope in *Him*, hope in the Christ of the Book; and thou shalt never be put to confusion.

But now I must hasten, I see the poor creature coming, with a wrap, shall I say, of some kind, pulled about her thin, sharp shoulders, pushing through the crowd. And they, perhaps, turned upon her in anger. None of us like to be shoved in a crowd. Men would turn sharply round, but when they saw her wasted frame, all their manhood's pity rose up; they stood back and made a lane for her, until she came right in behind the Lord. I see her put forth a hand "like the veined marble." She touches the Saviour's robe; and straightway I did rub mine eyes to see if it was the same woman. Oh what a change! Straightway the mortal pallor went from her face, the pinching from her frame. The weight of twelve years lifted and floated away like the clouds before the sun; straightway she was whole. "She felt in her body that she was healed of that plague." She was a "braw lass" once more.

The same Christ is with us to-night, and you have but to touch Him, you have but to come into contact with Him ever so little, and you will be infinitely the better for it. She did not come boldly and ask for healing, although she was welcome to do so. No, she merely touched the tassel of His robe. If you and He come into touch at all, you are

infinitely and eternally the better, for there is no littleness in Him. He cannot give a sinner a *little* blessing ; it is either whole or none. He cannot give you a little pardon for some of the biggest and worst of your sins ; He either forgives "*all* our iniquities," as David says in the Psalm, or He is not there at all. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgiveth *all mine* iniquities, who healeth *all my* diseases." "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the *riches* of His grace." That is what this woman found out. And if you have ever so little faith, notwithstanding a great deal of dimness and darkness, if your heart, if your trust, if your confidence is going out to the Lord Himself, the most distant glance of faith saves the soul. 'Twasn't the finger's touch—" *thy faith* hath saved thee." Then *you* may be saved without bodily contact.

Now, I want to spend just a minute on that touch. "I know the difference," virtually says our Lord, "between jostling and touching ; it was somebody who did not shoulder and elbow Me in the crowd, but somebody touched Me with meaning, with intention, with signification. Because, you see, there is touching *and* touching." When you are going out down these aisles to-night, you can illustrate this point. I push against you, and you against me, but I would never look round ; it is only what I expect. You can, however, come behind me when I am going out, and with your finger and thumb so touch me, that at once I should wheel round and say, "Well, what do you want?" You can put your whole heart down there between your finger and thumb.

There are a great many more ways of asking for a thing than putting it in words. You know how a child asks. It does not put its request in words always. It goes and stands sometimes before the something that it wants; the child looks at it, and then looks at you; it knows that that is "asking;" and you come and say, "Are you wanting that?" This woman had her own way of asking; and Christ meant to say, "I know that I am pressed and thronged; but, Peter, there was somebody in that crowd whose touch was a prayer. I heard somebody say, 'Lord, there is a poor dying woman out here who wants to be healed;' *that* was in the touch. I heard it ring like a call-bell in My soul. There was a sob in that touch." Now, are we going to touch Him to-night with intention, with meaning, putting our soul into it? Are we sitting here thinking about Christ *with the "think" that is a touch?* with the think that is a prayer that shoots itself into Christ's heart, no matter though the hosts of heaven surround Him.

Salvation is so easy as this; the Lord is so full of blessing that if you will only sit there, saying in your heart, and thinking in your heart, "Oh Lord, *I* want to be saved!" then it is done, and saved you are. "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

Touching *and* touching! I like to dwell on that, because we are so apt to think, a number of us, that if we are in the general crowd, that will do. But that *won't* do, and some of us, up to this hour, have only been in the crowd. The

Lord Jesus Christ never once yet heard your cry, or felt the throb of your faith.

It is like this : You have been out there in the country taking a walk, perhaps, with your child on a Saturday afternoon. You have come to a post at the roadside on which the telegraph wires are stretched, and if it is a blowy, breezy day, you know how the little boy likes to lean his ear against the post and listen to the hum and thrum of the wires. The boy stands back and says, "Father, is that the noise of sending a message?" He very likely thinks it is. You say, "No, my boy, that is not the noise of the message." You explain that it is only the sound made by the wind playing through the tightened wire, and that that wind has no power to send a message from town to town. Oh no, the winds are pressing and thronging them ; but they are making no use of the wires for the purpose of an intelligent message. If you want to send a message along those wires, it is not by the breeze blowing through them that you do it. You have to go away to the end of the wire, into the office. I remember how I sent my first telegraphic message. All round about the outer rim of a circular machine there were the letters of the alphabet. I generated electricity by turning a handle, and spelled out my message by touching or pressing the buttons marked with the alphabet all round about, as was necessary. That is how to "touch" the wire that it may become alive with meaning from your heart to some distant friend, and say, "Come, for mother, or father, is dying." Now, there is the Bible, and if you will take one

of the texts, and use it like the telegraph plunger, and just press it with the weight of your own need, it will say, "Lord, this is me;" He will acknowledge it, and say, "Yes; here I am." You have called up the Lord! You have wired to heaven; you have touched the Lord's very heart the moment that you press your own soul's finger anywhere on His own word of promise.

Or this touching *and* touching is like fishing—and with this I close. I do not know if you have ever been fishing from a boat in the deep sea; but here is how I have often done it away yonder on the Firth of Clyde. You do not fish with a rod, but with baited hooks, which are carried, when you put them over the side with a leaden weight, away far down out of sight to the bottom. You sit there in the boat with the line over the end of your finger. If you are not well up to fishing with the line in that way, you will always be pulling it up, thinking there is a fish. The tide—the run of the tide—against that tightened line makes a kind of trembling motion, which causes those not used to line-fishing to think that there is a bite; but when you get used to it, you know it is the mere flow of the tide against the string. You sit there, and although that trembling goes on, you do not allow it to "touch" you. But suddenly, while you are sitting there, oh it is unmistakable, a fish closes its mouth on the hook. Away at the bottom there is a wriggle. It comes right up the line, it goes through you, body and soul. There is no mistaking the trembling touch of life.

Now, like a fisher in his boat, the Lord sitteth on the

floods. He is letting down into this Regent Square Church to-night His richly baited Gospel-hooks : they are dangling there just in front of your soul. When you close with the Gospel, ever so little, He feels it. "I am touched, I am *touched*. Down yonder, in Regent Square, a poor sinner has touched Me." There is a connection made. You are fastened ; and He begins to pull. That is what the Lord was doing when He turned round and asked about the poor woman. He simply wanted to land His fish. When you get a fish hooked away down there at the bottom, you do not stop and make away home then. No, you have to land your fish, and you begin to pull up ; and you watch for the scaly gleam to show what you have got. A fish hooked is not a fish landed by any means.

The point is this : You have first to take Christ, and then to confess Christ. She fell down before Him, and told all the truth. You cannot come to Christ and steal a blessing, and then slip back and say, "I won't tell anybody." There is no getting in behind Christ's back ; for the moment you come behind His back He turns round, and then you are in front. You have to come out openly and confess Christ. And when you do it, the great blessing of it is that He seals and confirms your faith. When she came and confessed Him before them all, then He said to her, "Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath saved thee." Not her touch, but her trust ; not her finger, but her faith through her finger ! "Thy *faith* hath made thee whole ; go in peace." He sealed the blessing upon her because she confessed Him before the world.



The Lord will never ask a woman to do an *immodest* thing, will He ? And yet the Lord insists upon this confession for every man and woman. We must break with false modesty, false shame, and cringing fear. We must confess what great things He hath done for us. And by His help we shall. Amen.





# Regent Square Pulpit.

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NEVER SAY "DIE."

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## An Evangelistic Address

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE CHURCH

BY THE

REV. JOHN McNEILL.

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"And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore come; let us fall unto the host of the Syrians."—2 KINGS vii. 3; and so on.

"WHY sit we here until we die?" That is a plain question that these poor wretched people put to themselves, and after failing to find an answer, to confirm them in their sitting still, they rose up and went forward, and in doing so there came upon them abundant relief and blessing.

Out of this narrative comes an amazing Gospel lesson, both for all preachers and for all poor sinners gathered together to hear them, as we are gathered together now.

"Why sit we here until we die?" If we say we will enter into the city, "then the famine is in the city." That was true. The hosts of Syria had come up against God's people; they had come up in great numbers and

power; they had sat down about the city; there was a state of siege: none went out, none came in. The Israelites were sorely distressed. There was no food. Famine and destitution ruled throughout the city, and all were plunged into a state of fear and misery. And these poor lepers, because they were lepers, were not allowed to live in the city, to dwell in the habitable part of the land. Lepers were kept separated from all others. And this miserable congregation of four leprous men were now extra miserable because of the famine that was encircling them in the land. The lot of lepers was generally bad enough, but in a time like this it was unbearable.

However, the strange thing to notice is how that, in the midst of these despairing circumstances, hope sprang up, or something, which I can hardly call hope, moved in the minds of these four leprous men. I can, as I said, hardly call it hope, but rather, the desperation of despair. It turned to hope, and hope turned to full fruition. But that is how it came about. It arose out of the densest darkness which was all round about them. This made them say, "Why sit we here until we die?"

I trust the vision I have had concerning some of you, whom I have invited to come to this Gospel service, has come to pass. My brother, my sister, I invited you to God's house, and you have come. You have not been in a place of worship for a long time, and I am glad to see you here. You have come in here in a sort of despairing mood. You can't say you have come here expecting to be blessed. I will look at you as at the lowest ebb—that you have only come. You are barely inside the door, but you are inside. You are no longer sitting a-dozing over your pipe, or in the ale-house. You are here, I don't say full of eagerness and hope and

alacrity, but, thank God, you are here. You have said, something like the leprous men, "Well, well, my life has got more and more weary since I kept away from the churches and the preachers. Certainly since I became an outcast" (and you cast yourself out) "I have become darker and darker and more and more wretched." And when you got my invitation you said, "Well, I will go once more to the church, for it can't be worse for me;" and here you are. But since you have come in, any little hope you had, that you might receive some benefit, has all vanished, for you have found the preacher is a Scotchman and has a Scotch accent; and this fact is like a wet blanket on you, and you say, "If I had known this, I would not have come at all." Well, it is a good thing you did not know it. And, notwithstanding that, your feelings are as the "darkie" said, "below Zero;" notwithstanding that you are almost overwhelmed with your misery and disappointment, the Lord can still magnify Himself, and do great things for you, even through me.

The grand thing is *to get done with our sitting still*. That is the killing thing—doing nothing. Young and old, rich and poor, let the days and months and years come and go, and sit still doing nothing for their souls. The grey hairs are gathering fast on some of you, and you are not a bit farther forward; but a little older, and a little heavier, and a little more damned than you were some time ago. But, bless God, you are here, and that at last my thought entered your mind. "Well, I will put on my hat and trail myself out to the church." It was not very much to do, and God would be perfectly justified if He didn't give any great blessing on it. But you see God is so willing to bless that He will begin with you anywhere, where you will begin with Him.

"Why sit we here until we die?"

Why, there is power enough in that thought to begin a great revival of church-going and a great revival of salvation all over London, throughout its whole circumference, if only, in the mercy of God, it could be begun; if only in the East End and the West End, and the South and the North, and this deadest bit of all the Western Central, these masses of men and women, some living in big houses, some in small houses, some in garrets, some in cellars, and some in no houses at all; if only these masses would begin to *turn* in their deadness and wretchedness; if it's only like the turning of the drunkard in his drunken sleep, muttering something on his wretched pallet of straw. God turn you in your wretchedness. It may be the beginning of your awaking. I think I see your soul turning and tossing itself in its uneasy sleep, the sleep that paralyzes into despair. But you are waking up, thank God; and the end of this waking will be salvation, I trust, to the glory of God's great name.

"Why sit we here until we die?" And no one of the four could get any better answer than that they had sat still long enough. "If we go into the city, there is famine; and if we stay here, we shall die." Look at that—death for staying still, or death for entering the famine-stricken city. Now, my young friend, perhaps you say, "Yes; it is quite true for poor wretched leprous men to move themselves, or for the poor tramp who has come in here to-night to seek relief in the Gospel; but it is not for a young fellow of twenty-three like me." And you think of all the prospects of life lying before you, of the fine oyster you are going to open. But you are wrong here. From God's point of view, from the Bible point of view, all are leprous, all are poor sin-



contaminated, law-condemned sinners. The first awaking to this fact is a blessing. The determination to make a move, a shift from your deathlike position, when you say, "I am not going to let the devil have it all his own way! I will move, at any rate"—just like those lepers. They realized their wretched state—death reigned all around them, and would soon reign over them. Their position reminds us of the "Light Brigade," under Lord Lucan, when—

" Canon to right of them,  
Canon to left of them,  
Canon in front of them,  
Volleyed and thundered.  
Stormed at with shot and shell—  
Into the jaws of death,  
Into the mouth of hell,  
Rode the six hundred."

So with those poor lepers; death was all around them, and on every side. So it is with all men, for we read, "So death passed upon all men, for all have sinned." Death reigned through one man. "In Adam all die." All are born "dead in trespasses and sins." Death everywhere, and no hope anywhere. I can't help you, and you can't help me. No man is able to redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him. But "why sit we here until we die?"

The fifth verse goes on to say, "And they rose up in the twilight, to go to the camp of the Syrians: and when they came to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there. For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses,

even the camp as it was, and fled for their life. And when these lepers arose and came to the camp, behold, there was no man there."

These lepers moved from where death was to where death was expected; but they thought when they came to the camp the Syrian sentry would kill them out of the way, striking their death-blow with a zest; this would be better than dying the lingering death of starvation. "Why sit we here until we die? Now, therefore, let us fall into the host of the Syrians." The lepers said, "We will go in that direction"; and although they expected death, they got relief. Now the Gospel, the glad tidings coming out of this is, that when the soul begins to awaken out of its benumbed, dumb state of dark despair, and deploras its starving condition; when it says, "It is time I made a shift, for life is slipping away, and my leprosy is not diminishing, my death is getting more deadly every year I live," the true state and condition is realized, and the soul being convinced that there is no hope in sitting still, is determined to arise, to flee for refuge to the only hope in the Gospel. And this conviction may come into the mind of the young man of seventeen, as well as to the mind of the old grey-haired reprobate of seventy. And when the soul is convinced of its state, and the determination is made to arise and flee, it is not in joy and gladness that they move. These poor lepers didn't go heartily, singing songs, and dancing merrily along, as if a great blessing had come; but the death that was threatening them drove them on, and they went hopping along, somehow or other, for stop they dare not. So with us when we realize our leprous condition. Through sin we can no longer sit still; we feel we are being driven on by time, and that there is no resting, no stopping; death is

upon us, saved or unsaved, ready or unready. What a good thing, then, to feel stirred up by something!

The lepers said, "We will go into the camp of the Syrians." As I said, they expected death, but when they came to the camp a wonderful thing had happened. I think I see these four wretched lepers approaching; I see them arrive at the edge of the camp, expecting the challenge of the Syrian guard. But, lo! no guard was there. Everything was most unnaturally quiet, and in they slipped, and as they moved in farther and farther and saw no one, their courage grew, and they realized that they were in a deserted camp, surrounded with food and plenty, the spoils of the departed host.

Now, don't you see in this the Gospel story? The sinner, when convinced of his lost, ruined, guilty state, has with this conviction a wrong idea and impression of God and salvation. He has the notion—the mistaken notion—that God is full of anger and wrath, and that in coming to Him he will be destroyed. Just like the lepers, they thought the Syrians would kill them. But, as it turned out to the lepers, instead of finding enemies and death, they found food, and all they needed; so instead of the sinner being smitten with God's justice, God's mercy is revealed to him; and instead of death, he receives the gift of eternal life. That's the English of it; the Gospel of it.

Now, let me appeal at once to you, my friends, and say your notions about God are all wrong. We are completely at variance with the truth. You haven't a notion of God that is worth having, not one. The man who hasn't been to Jesus Christ and got his own sins forgiven at the Cross of Calvary, hasn't a notion of God that is worth a snuff. Do you understand me? That's plain enough. I don't

care what you fancy you know, you are as completely in the dark as to what awaits you as were those four lepers, while as yet they forecasted their reception, but didn't go on to prove the actual condition of things. Now, if you come to Christ to-night, you will find He is not such a terror as you believed Him to be.

I don't intend to go into the reason why we have these wrong notions, but we have them. You wouldn't be sitting the unwashed sinner you are if you hadn't this wrong notion. Pardon me for putting it plainly: Dogs return to their vomit, and swine that were washed to their wallowing in the mire, and men and women sit and hear, and die while they sit. Why is it? It is because they don't believe; it is because you don't rise and totter forward on your last legs, and use this opportunity to be saved. For if you did, you would find, as we have found when we went to God, there is nothing to terrify. It is with God just as it was in the Syrian camp: the four lepers who journeyed there expected only destruction when they arrived, but instead of that, it yielded safety and feasting, life and security, everything needed, all for the taking.

Now, that is an illustration of Christ and His salvation. Leave your drink, leave your unbelief, leave your false notions as to what you think will be your reception if you come to God and put your trust in Christ, and actually come. Then you will agree with all those hard things I was saying just now. Why, even when we do think there is a better reception, when we do actually come, we find abundance of all we need, yea, more than our best idea.

So it is with the Prodigal Son. He had a little hope that it would be better for him to return to his father's house.

He said, "I will go back to my father, but very likely he will cut up rough for I have been a bad, young scamp; but I will go—and just watch how humble I will be, for I know how to work the old man, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.' And won't that be awfully humbling? and I will cringe and beseech him to pardon me, and although he storms at me and says, 'Where are those fine clothes you went away with, and all the money you took, and why do you come back to me with your rags and tatters? Away to your bad companions, and see what they will do for you.' And I will say to my father, 'It is desperately true,' and will cut me to the quick, every word of it, but I will bow my head and say, 'I admit it, I have been a bad fellow;' and so I will stand before him, and bring him down, and melt him." But you know how his father received him. We read, "While he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him."

And the son began his carefully prepared little story, but his father interrupted him with kisses, and he could never get to the end of it. For the father said to his servant, "Bring hither the best robe, and put it on him; bring forth the fatted calf, and kill it. For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost but is found." There is the same idea—the overwhelming abundance of welcome and pardon and peace if you will only come to Christ as a guilty sinner. We might well believe that for such guilty ones in coming to God that there was only strictness, righteousness, and severity: "Only pay me what thou owest twenty shillings to the pound," which means utter condemnation.

and hopelessness for all, doesn't it? Ah! yes, my friends, there used to be a great many terrors in men's minds about God, just as in the case of the Syrian camp, which was full of terrors to the poor lepers. But one day there came to this world one called Jesus, and He entered into a conflict with all that was a terror to men, guilty men, and He obeyed the law of God which men had broken and break continually. He magnified the law and made it honourable, and then suffered for those who had broken it. He suffered unto death, even the death of the cross; He bare the sins of men in His own body on the tree, and, having destroyed all that stood between sinners and God, He lifted up His glorious voice and cried, "It is finished!" and ever since that shout there has been nothing between the coming sinner and the risen Saviour, and there will be nothing between them all the way to Jordan. All the road is filled with tokens of Christ's conquering power and Christ's victorious grace; all the road from the cross to the Jordan of death. Nothing to cause fear, nothing to cause terror, but everything to cause us to enter into the joy of salvation and delight in the abundance of grace and peace that Christ's life, death, and resurrection have secured for us. "He died, He arose from the dead." Christ hath overcome all our enemies, and now there is nothing left for us in the heavenly way but to walk over and walk into the heavenly Jerusalem. Ah! sinner, will you join those who have accepted Jesus? Will you come to Him to-night? There is no terror. He won't shake you over the pit. But say you, "What about my sins?" Christ the Sin-Bearer, He calls to Him the sin-burdened. "Ah!" says the poor drunkard, who was drunk last night and roaring through this neighbourhood, "Can I come to Christ,



come now, and be forgiven?" Yes, of course you can. Come and try. Believe me, and see if He does not blot out your sins and give you pardon and peace.

And you, young man, you who say to me, "Preacher, you would not call me a sinner, would you?" Yes, you, with all your fine clothes, with your fine-coloured tie and your nice "screw," I am here to tell you that you are only a leper, that you need warning; and if that is not true, I will stop speaking. I am not going to say that you don't need warning, but that you do; that all have sinned, and are guilty before God: "there is none good, no, not one." You are leprous; don't deceive yourself. You may not have felt that your leprosy has broken out, but you are leprous. Take my word for it, and if you come to Jesus He will heal you. I am not speaking what I do not know. I can speak, as Paul did, from experience. Paul testified of his conversion, and I can do the same. If you hear a preacher who never tells you of his own conversion, I think you should make a change. God deliver us from preachers who never testify that they have been changed—"that they were blind, but now they see." Paul was different from such men; he told over and over again his conversion. And I, in a much simpler way, and infinitely far behind the Apostle, I would do the same thing. I thought I knew about these things, because I was brought up as a Christian, and had learned a sound Catechism. I knew the Bible, and was religious. But all my religion was in my head. And I remember that it was just like scales falling from my eyes when I actually believed the truths contained in God's Word, and understood for myself in my heart the love God had for me. "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies when some new planet

swims into his ken." Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes he stared on the Pacific, and all his men stood silent with a wild surprise upon a peak in Darien. That was my mount of vision. And it was the same when these four lepers went to the camp of the Syrians. And when they arrived there, they found not a soul. They went into this tent and the other tent, and found not a soul to say a word, good or bad. The whole thing lying at their disposal! This is an illustration of the Gospel. Christ has died and has destroyed all the enemies of the coming sinner who rises up and comes to God in all his leprous condition. Christ has died, yea, risen again; and He comes to-night and shows us all the joys of God's love, as represented by Christ's atoning sacrifice, and He lays all that infinite love of His, as represented in His holy life and His atoning death, and as represented in His resurrection power, He sets all that over against the just desert of every coming sinner.

These poor starving leprous men came to the Syrian camp, upon the provision of a hundred thousand men, shall I say? Far more than that. So come to Christ, and there is more in Him, far more than you and I and a million of us could possibly need. "My grace is sufficient for you." Dear me! Surely the great ocean is big enough for a sprat like you, isn't it? And that "My grace" is sufficient for thee individually. Try—ay, trust! And I am not minimizing your sin or mine. But I am magnifying "the grace of God that bringeth salvation unto man." "And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there. And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they

went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver and gold and raiment, and went and hid it."

The ninth verse, and with this I close. "Then they said one to the other, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household." And they went away and spread the tidings, and these four lepers, that you would not have given twopence-halfpenny for, were used in God's providence to bring tidings of a great relief and great revival among God's people. God is not done with a person when he brings him to the abundance of the Gospel provision. As I sometimes say, there are these two temptations: Sometimes I am tempted to sit still in black despair and unbelief, and never try to seek salvation, but let it all go by till life is passed; and the other temptation is that when I do rise up, and when I do come to Christ in my resolution and feeling, and when I do believe in Him with all my heart, and see for myself that it is all right—(God be praised)—I am forgiven; that I, a sinner, must be forgiven through the blood and righteousness of God's dear Son; that Christ's salvation is for sinners, therefore it is for me. That "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely;" and I call myself "whosoever," and I claim all His work for me. After I have come unto God, come unto this great abundance of grace that He has for "whosoever," and enjoyed it, my temptation is *to clap down again*, fall into my old place, and do nothing but feed, feed, feed my soul on all that the Bible and the preacher can bring to me still further to assure me of my salvation by faith without works: "In God's dear Son, who died for sin, and rose again." And

that is what some of you are doing, and that is why we need to-night to evangelize Christians and saved people. Why, what a shame it is! At last these lepers felt it was such a shame that the blush came on their leprous faces—on the sickly faces, white and scaly—and they said, "Well, now, we are a bad lot, really we are a bad lot, before God and man. Here we are, trying to swell ourselves out, trying to eat the grub of an army, and grabbing all the silver and gold we can lay our hands upon. But our hands can't hold any more, and we can't swallow any more food, and all this abundance of provision will be spoilt. And so at last they said, "Let us go and tell the king's household," who are dying with fright and hunger. The king and all the people in the city were shaking in their shoes for nothing at all. They were staying in the city with their faces as white as paper, because of the hosts of the Syrians, as they thought, close to them, ready to slay them, whereas there is nothing in the camp but a few horses tied up and a few asses, that would not harm anybody. "Let us go and tell the king's household," they say. I do believe, Christian friends, that a good number of us have been to Jesus for a cleansing—we have been washed in the blood of the Lamb; but, instead of rising up and going "to tell to all around what a dear Saviour we have found," we have sat still and lost all the splendid opportunities that God in His providence has placed in our way of proclaiming the good tidings.

You are sitting still now, and you will degrade the Gospel feast into a disgraceful guzzle, and you do nothing, nothing at all to spread the joyful news of the truth as it is in Jesus, nothing to testify to your fellows. No gripping of a man by the hand and saying to him, "Look here, my

brother, you are all wrong and I am right now, and I want you to get right, to get the right thing. The Lord lives, and He is love. Christ has bought forgiveness, and I have found it out. Come along with me, and I will tell you all about it, and I will show you the Gospel feast, and do all that one man can do for another to induce him to accept salvation. Save you I can't, Christ alone can do that." This is what you would be doing, and it is a crying shame that you as a Christian are not doing it. These lepers got so tired of trying to stuff themselves with all the bounty that they found in the camp, that they determined to go and tell others of the plenty that was at their doors and that they were in ignorance of.

But you have not got so far as that yet, not a bit of it. You will come and listen to sermons and take your fill of the good tidings of the Gospel, and that is the end of it.

"Now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household." First these lepers said, "Let us rise up and go to the camp of the Syrians, for why sit we here until we die." And then, after having had their fill of the abundance that was in the deserted camp, they determined to go and tell those poor fearing, starving Israelites that their enemies were all fled from the besieging camp, and there was abundance of all they needed in the camp of their foe, to be had for the taking.

This is what we should do. We should say, "Why sit we here until this abundance of heavenly manna grows rotten and sour about us for the want of eating." Don't let it waste, nor let it spoil, but remember how great a Saviour Christ is, and how great a sinner you are, and how bountifully all this marvellous provision for the poor sinner is just

laid around for you. Go and tell the sinner that there is bread to satisfy his hunger, and water to quench his thirst ; that God—not the ogre, the terror, that sinners have thought He was, but God in Christ—is waiting to receive the lost, the worst that ever lived, and they shall be saved. "Thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee." He will say to thee, "Fury is not in Me," as the old prophet puts it in His name. He will say to thee, "He that believeth hath everlasting life."

May God bless the preaching of the Gospel. May you be brought to Christ, and then go and tell others what a great Saviour you have found. Amen.





# Regent Square Pulpit.

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THE ECLIPSE OF FAITH.

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## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE CHURCH,

BY THE

REV. JOHN McNEILL.

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“ But Thomas, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe. And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them : then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands ; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side : and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto Him, Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed : blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”  
JOHN XX. 24-29.

THIS disaster, or well-nigh disaster, this eclipse that came to the faith of Thomas, an eclipse which at one time was total, and alarmingly seemed to be permanent, came about in a very simple way. The Scripture does not enter into any detail as to why Thomas was not there, but it certainly in the forepart of the narrative emphasizes his absence, and in the centre part of the tale, equally emphasizes his presence. “ Thomas *was not with them* when Jesus came. . . .

And again eight days after the disciples were together, *and Thomas was with them* ; " the Holy Spirit wishing to draw our attention surely, somewhat at least, to the fact that it was the absence that caused this eclipse of faith, although afterwards, all thanks to the Lord and little or none to Thomas, the eclipse moved off, and there came the clear shining after the gloom and the rain. And still, dear friends, is it not so that on such a simple thing as being present with our brethren or absent from them, there may come to us a great eclipse of faith, or a vision and revelation of the Lord? Great doors turn often on invisible hinges, and such a great thing as a spiritual catastrophe, or a spiritual revelation that shall tell on ourselves and others for long and long, may depend on such a little thing as Thomas's depended on, his presence with or his absence from the company of those who held his own faith and expectation.

And let me apply this at the very outset, for we all need it. Do not be easily moved aside from the path that leads you into this house, into the fellowship of your brethren here and into the fellowship of that One who is greater than us all : greater than the house, and greater than all our ordinances, our invisible but ever-present Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself. I do not know what kept Thomas away, and we must not speak too confidently, but it is worth hanging upon for a minute. Was he not absent, dear brethren and intending fellow-communicants, just because he a little too much gave way to what was a prevailing tendency of his? I think that Thomas's mind worked rather slowly, and his body somewhat corresponded to the operations of his mind. He was not naturally joyous, swift, bright of face, or ready of tongue and hand and foot.

He moved to mental conclusions, and moved his body along with him to definite acts and purposes somewhat irresolutely and slowly.

We do not know much about Thomas, and all that we know comes to us in John's Gospel virtually ; but always when he comes before us, he comes somewhat characteristically. It is Thomas who says, when Christ would go to Jerusalem, "Let us also go with Him, that we may die with Him." He seemed inclined to take the heaviest and the darkest view. It was Thomas who, when Christ said, "I am going away, and whither I go ye know, and the way ye know," said, "We know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way?" stumbling himself with a too literal apprehension of what Christ said and what Christ meant. And here again it is Thomas characteristically. He is always himself, and out of that characteristic of his came first of all his weakness, and latterly, through the revelation of Christ and the baptism of Christ's own Spirit, the splendid strength which he showed in the end of this simple, homely, and yet heavenly tale of Christ's appearing to His people.

I do not know whether you have ever thought of it just as I have, but the vision is before my mind, for I try to make all these Scripture characters my friends ; and surely if our imagination is fitted for "bodying forth the form of things unknown," it cannot be put to a more legitimate exercise than when you try to body forth the form of Thomas.

I have set him before my mind as a solid, somewhat stolid, beetle-browed, low-set man—as we should say across the Border, a rather dour type of man—a man who did not open to you readily, but when once he did open, he let you

in ; he let you all in. Not a bad kind of man, but a man who needed watching, and a man who, when he comes to the faith of Jesus Christ, needs tender handling from his Lord ; needs at the first, with all his good qualities, to be taken by the hands and taught to go. In the case of Thomas, as with Ephraim of old, the Lord has to become to him a nursing father or a nursing mother. He took him by the hands, and let him feel his feet below him, while those strong hands were undergirding him, till the feet and ankle-bones found and exercised their strength. I rather think that on this occasion Thomas, yielding to his characteristics, had withdrawn himself a little from the brethren. Wonderful things had happened. Food for thought had come to a man who was no weakling in the line of personal thinking. He was strong there, but with an unfortunate tendency *to separate himself* from more joyous, swiftly-moving, bright-faced, and bright-hearted brethren ; to go apart in silence and in solitude, that he might for himself think to the bottom of all things that had come to pass in those wonderful days, with all the streaking of bright and dark in the sky which was just ahead of them, and towards which they were travelling.

And what I want to say is this. If there are any people of Thomas's disposition here, my dear friends, learn from him, and do not yield so much to it. If you will allow me to say so tenderly, but firmly, there are among us here those who ought not to keep so much by themselves ; you are not to be trusted so much by yourself. You must not trust yourself with yourself so much as you trust yourself with us ; you are not the best companion for yourself. You ought not to take solitary walks, but you ought, so to speak, to see to it that you have with you some brighter

person, even granted that it should be some person of mercurial disposition, some person of a brighter temperament, some person of a simpler faith and a more unquestioning spirit, granted that he is not so broad and beetle-browed as yourself, granted that he has not the far forward reach of mind that you have. All the more, because of that these simple souls are your best companions. You do not go out without your walking-stick, therefore do not go out without your walking companion—somebody very plain and very homely, just as homely as an ashen or an oaken stick, but some one whom you need to have at hand. There are far too many of us who keep away from our brethren.

I had a letter, not long ago, from a lady, evidently a person of great intelligence and culture, and I rather think that she is known in the literary world as an authoress. She tells me that she has suffered very severely because of this. When she came to the faith of Jesus Christ, with all her vivacity and all her great powers of deep and serious thinking on the problems of life and destiny, she found the simple-minded Wesleyans no congenial companions, and she withdrew herself from those simple-minded people who

“Felt like singing all the time,”

and who shouted “Hallelujah” rather too much for her inclination, to knit her brows over some question or religious problem. She withdrew herself to more dangerous society. As she said herself in her letter: “Undeniably goats are more clever and amusing than sheep; and I left the company of the sheep and went in among the goats; and I have suffered for it. The more I revealed to my new companions my faith in Jesus Christ, the more they trampled upon me and butted me with their horns.” At last she humbled herself to come back again among those

who, with all our differences, dear friends, are of our kith and kin. We are of the same flesh and the same blood if we have at all in our hearts the faith and fear of Jesus. So you, dear Thomases, do not sit apart. You need us, and we need you. Remember, you are not an independent unit, called Thomas ; you are one of the twelve.

“Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is ;” and instead of going apart into your quiet chamber on Wednesday night to read a book—a book which perhaps you think will do you a great deal of good, but maybe will only pander too much to the dangerous side of you, and lead you into deeper darkness, come in among us here, where we are not so much feeding the questioning side of our nature as trying to feed the spiritual believing side. And, let me speak to others who are not quite like Thomas. You do not go aside *and think*. You are, unfortunately, just like withered leaves, and any wind that blows can whisk you out of the path that leads to the prayer-meeting and the House of God. Suffer that word in the by-going.

Thomas was not with them, whether he had a good reason or a bad reason. I rather think that it was because of that prevailing tendency of his nature to sit apart and brood and meditate over the things that had been and the things that were to be, alone. See the mischief that comes. The disciples were holding together as disciples always should, for the Lord counts up the number of the people, and He knows us every one. We need more than ever in these days to realize our solidarity and our union, and he who easily absents himself from the united congregation of God's people may do a grievous damage to their company. And it came to pass—you can see it better than I can tell it—



that, when the disciples went out from that meeting, they met Thomas. Maybe he was coming late, just like ourselves. But be that as it may, they met him, and their faces were radiant, and they clapped their hands, and I hear Peter's voice—"We have seen the Lord!" And Thomas's face grew darker still. That is the worst side of you. If you were easily lifted out of the doldrums—if you were easily lifted out of your dumps and your gloom, it would not so much matter; but the trouble with you slow-going people is that when there is a blessing going about, and you hear of it, and you were not there, you very nearly take the blessing away from those who have got it. They went to Thomas, and that great wave of joy broke itself in vain against that stubborn rock called Thomas; instead of sweeping him onward and upward into their own state of happy fellowship with the risen Saviour. There he was, rooted in his unbelief, and a little more rooted just because they were so bright.

Ah, there were several things working in that poor man's heart, were there not? Thomas is not one of the men to jump at a thing readily. And Peter would be thinking, "What a pity he was not there, because I almost feel that his want of faith in what we saw is making me doubt my own eyes." Maybe it was only a hallucination. There was a danger of that eclipse that was on Thomas's faith and face spreading over all their faith and all their faces. Again I say, do not pride yourselves upon that slowness-to-believe of yours. It may work infinite mischief to yourselves and others. If it is your characteristic, try to work against it, and to get it brightened to a more vivid, living, simple, evangelical faith in Christ crucified, and in the same Christ risen again and appearing to simple-minded believers.

You can imagine also that this thought may have been in Thomas's trouble. He was not one of your modern sceptics. He was doubting; but his heart went against, not with his doubt. I fancy that his lips quivered a little, and that he said, in a voice in which anger was striving with tears, "Do you say that He came to you?" "Yes, we have seen the Lord." "And did He never miss me? Did He never ask for me? Did He not by some word show that He noticed my vacant place?" And he clenches his hands, he gets on the wrong side, and says, "It is all very well for you, Peter, and for you, John, to get into these raptures; but unless I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, I will not believe. It was on my arm that His dead head hung, as He was taken down from the cross. I saw how limp and lifeless, how awfully and truly dead He was; and this is a story I shall take at second-hand from no living man." I sympathize with Thomas there, and we are at liberty to sympathize with him over this news. I have as much right, O blessed Saviour (with reverence be it said) to get my faith in Thy resurrection confirmed to me personally as Peter and John and James, and the women who actually saw Thee that time that Thomas was absent. "If it is true, then I want it to be true to me. I have as much right, Peter, to be confirmed in the faith of Christ's resurrection as you have; and, Peter, it seems very strange to me that Christ should come to you and show Himself to you alive and well, after His passion, in actual habit, as He lived, and not show Himself to me." Thomas was angry a little just because he was a man who loved his Lord; and he did not want to lie down in scepticism and unbelief. "To be angry," does not Coleridge say, "To be angry with one we love, doth work like madness on the brain"? There

is a little touch of that madness coming to Thomas, and making his judgment for the moment reel. "I will not believe." Suppose, for a moment, that word should come to you, or word should come to me, if it could come, that our dead friend whom we buried in the graveyard on Friday afternoon, our dead father or mother or dearest friend, had been seen by some one ; had revealed themselves to him. Suppose it to be true (and it will be true some day, blessed be God), what would you think ? What would you say if your dead wife or husband had appeared to me, but not to you ? You would stand still, as Thomas stood, and say, "But why to you, and not to me?" Where is the land some of us would not cross—where is the sea we would not sail, if on the other side of it we could see in habit, as they lived, those whom we loved and lost awhile ?

The next scene is eight days afterwards. The disciples were within, and Thomas was with them. "Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then said He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands ; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side : and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God."

Notice this : Christ was not only present with them when Thomas was absent, but Christ had marked Thomas's absence. Christ was present with them in this outside meeting, where Thomas's faith suffered the eclipse. Doubting soul, desponding soul, will you, will I, understand once for all that our secret sins are done in the light of His blessed face, and our mournings, and our glooms, and our unbeliefs are done with the Lord overhearing us ? How pathetic it is to read Livingstone's last journals, when

he was buried away yonder in the depths of Africa—how pathetic to read that there he was thinking of his children away in Scotland, and writing—

“I shall look into your faces  
And list to what you say,  
And be often very near you  
When you think I’m far away.”

Oh, just to think that when Thomas was standing there half sad, half mad, Christ was looking at him. As though He looked in at a window and through the lattice, Christ saw, Christ heard, Christ knew all about him. I think that that would humble Thomas afterwards. I think he would watch more than ever he did against that characteristic tendency of his to gloom and heaviness of heart. So with us. While coming to these table-seats to-day, perhaps more heavily than ever you came before, down, dull, and a little dogged, wanting to demand impossible evidences, you say, “Why do I not see more, and know more, and feel more?” Well, very likely if you attended more regularly, you would hear more and you would feel more. There again, I must speak sharply to you. Perhaps last Sabbath Day you were somewhere else. You were not here, but your wife was, and the Lord appeared to us. Shall we say that by His servant and His Word He spoke to us? Perhaps your wife went home radiant, and virtually saying, “I have seen the Lord.” And you tossed your head, and said, “Yes, it is always grand when I am not there.” Exactly; and you deserve it. You ought to have been here. But you are here this morning. We are glad to see you. Thank God for it. Be simpler in your faith; be livelier in your expectation. Speak away or speak down your doubts, and call upon your soul and all that is within you to come up to

the eye and the ear, to see and hear every tone and footfall of your passing Lord. Eight days afterwards the disciples were together. Thomas had another chance, and he went right this time where he went wrong before. The Lord singled him out, showing to us that that word is true: "Lo, I am with you alway, and I am often very near you when you think that I'm far away. When you are dull and desponding, then I am with you. On those dark and cheerless days, when your very heart is wrapped in fogs and mists, I never was nearer to you than then, and I wondered why you made yourself so miserable." The sun is always there in the heavens, not only to-day, but in those past days "when the leaf was stamped in clay, and the rotting woodlands dripped." He was there in the heavens then. These clouds and fogs are born of earth, and they do not in the slightest degree affect the fact that the sun in his splendour hangs up yonder. So with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord is gracious. Blessed be our Rock. These fogs, these doubts, these mists, are born of earth and time and sin. If they must occasionally pass across our spirits, let us never allow them to cause us to say, "My God hath forgotten me; my way is hidden from the Lord." Let us never come to this that, because it is night, with us therefore the sun has dropped out of the sky. These mists do come to us, and they may last for eight days, and they may last for longer, but, as surely as the Lord lives, sunshine shall return. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

Eight days afterwards Thomas is with them. He was in heaviness of heart for all those days; but the Lord comes back and scatters the mists and shines in upon him with

the very brightness of His own face. I do not know how it was with your newspapers, but I remember that about a year ago, in connection with the eclipse of the moon, my newspaper in Scotland published a time-table of the eclipse. I was told to the second of the most nicely balanced chronometer when the dark shadow would first impinge upon the bright service of the moon. I was told in the same definite way, to minutes and seconds, how the shadow would spread; when, precisely, the shadow would be half; when, precisely, the eclipse would be total; when, again, the eclipse would lift, would slide off, and would finally disappear, and the moon would walk in silver splendour through the heavens. So with these eclipses of our faith. Make God your Astronomer Royal, and then you may be sure of this: they are timed; they are calculated; and certainly they will lift and disappear, for He is the perpetually recurring Sun, and sooner or later He will shine in.

“Look to the light; all will be right:

Morning is ever the daughter of night.

All that was black will be all that is bright.”

When Thomas came, the Lord singled him out, and I think that Thomas's cheek burnt with a deeper red. He knew that he was going to get a blessing; but the Lord's gloved hand has a grip of steel. I think the Lord took Thomas down a long way, so that he never forgot it, when He singled him out and made him stand forth. “Thomas, I saw you. Thomas, I heard you. Thomas, I did miss you. Thomas, how unwisely you spoke.” “Thomas,” He said, “reach hither thy finger, and behold My hand; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless.” Oh, that is how the Lord described it. It may be that Thomas was inclined to think that it was because he was of a larger mental capacity than his brethren that he doubted. No; unbelief never looks well in the pages of this Book. Never. Maybe the Lord is singling out some of us here in order to gladden our hearts, in order to brighten



our faces, and also to make us blush a little for shame ; for really it is about time—is it not ?—that the blush of shame crept over the cheeks of some of us because of this doubting, this asking for impossible evidence, this beginning to cry like babies because our mother will not hand us down the moon. A great deal of our unbelief, if we probe it to the bottom, is not thoughtful, but thoughtless. Do not let us ask for impossible evidences, but let us be content to take a blessing on the word and testimony of others.

“ Reach hither thy hand.” I do not believe that Thomas did it. No ; he got the chance, that is one thing ; but he did not take the chance when he got it, and that is another thing. My dear desponding friend, look this way, and I will look the same way myself. It is something to know that, if the blessed Master liked, it is within the bounds of possibility that He might come in at these doors in habit as He lived, and stand here visibly just for a time at His own table, and put me to the side. He might hold out that hand with the track of the nail in it, and let you feel it. He might unrobe Himself and show His pierced side. He did it once ; He could do it again. I do not know how it tells on you, but it does encourage me to think that these wild evidences, so to speak, could be granted, and will be granted one day, blessed be His holy Name ! This Christ my eyes shall see for myself, and not another. We shall see Him, surely and infallibly. As surely as we believe in Him, so surely shall faith be turned to sight, and death be swallowed up in victory.

And the other thing to notice is that Thomas did not take the chance when he got it. It allows me to say, in the Lord’s Name, this kindly word, after all, to you and to myself. My dear friends, less would satisfy us than we are asking for. When we give way to our worst moods, oh, nothing but the rending heavens would confirm our faith. “ Show me the Lord. Come and stand before me. Let me see Thee as Thomas saw Thee.” We are just like Thomas ;

and, if we got the chance, we should not take it. Thomas did not thrust in his finger. Thomas did not thrust his hand into the side. How could he? Do not you see there is a rudeness and an essential indelicacy about unbelief, and we never are so conscious of it as when faith is strong and clear, and the vision of the Lord present and immediate to our hearts. What a rude, boisterous, indelicate thing it would have been for Thomas to be prodding with his finger into those blessed wounds. He could not, even when he got the opportunity he demanded. He virtually said, "Blessed Master, less will do;" and less will need to do for you and me. The Lord might come and stand before you, but it is not His way. For various reasons it is expedient for us that He should go away, and stay away. But He has given us great helps and great encouragements. He did this for Thomas for very wise and necessary reasons. You and I had to be helped to and confirmed in The Faith on the testimony of these men. This narrative has what the divines call great evidential value. We are "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone;" and this is enough for us all. When the Lord did this for Thomas, He virtually did it for you and me. Do not ask foolish, hurtful, morally impossible evidences to clear away your unbelief.

I said before, Thomas really wanted to believe, and he swung now into the region of faith with great celerity and with splendid emphasis. Perhaps, while I have been speaking, you have been saying, "Ah, yes, how like I am to Thomas." I beg your pardon; wait a little, wait a little. You are not simply a Thomas, my dear friend, because you say, "Well, if I could see Him just as He was, and if I could put my hand into the prints of the nails, then I would believe. Yes, I am very much like Thomas." That is not the sign of being Thomas. Thomas was not always sitting in petulance and heaviness, asking for these evidences. We

are not Thomases unless we can ring out like a triple peal of bells from an old steeple, "My Lord and my God!"

"Hallelujah, 'tis done,  
I believe in God's Son,  
I am saved by the blood  
Of the Crucified One!"

Let me hear our emphatic testimony of simple faith in Christ before I will allow you to say, or allow myself to say, that we are Thomases. Let me feel your pulse, as we can feel Thomas's here. You see that he swung round splendidly, and he came up out of the darkness all the brighter for having been for a time down there. So with you and me. Even these eclipses shall tell for our benefit if we come out of them, if we allow the Lord to shine in upon us, and if we come back to the simplicity of faith in His name.

It is a remarkable thing that out of the mouth of Thomas came a testimony to the essential Godhead and divinity of that Man of Nazareth that you find nowhere else in Scripture. Thomas looks poor in the early part of the story. It is easy for us to stand beside him there and say, "I am just like Thomas." Not long ago, on a very tired and spent Monday, I, your minister, flung myself down upon the sofa in weariness and spentness of body and mind, and my little three-year-old girl came and stood beside my shoulder and said, "Oh, I am as big as father!" Yes, because father was down; but when father pulled himself to his feet she only came up to his knee. And we are as big as Thomas when he is lying down prostrate and spent and groaning. When Elijah is lying under the juniper-tree you are another Elijah. But when these mighty saints take to their feet I rather think they come above us. And when Thomas does come to his feet he reveals his splendid proportions. "My Lord and my God." Not Gabriel before the throne ever did or ever could utter a more splendid testimony to the essential, eternal, uncreated Godhead and divinity of our Jesus than Thomas did when the Lord shone out upon him.

“ As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form  
 Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm ;  
 Tho’ round its base the rolling waves be spread,  
 Eternal sunshine settles on its head.”

Oh, may it be yours and mine, while we are here amid the mire and mists and storms of earth, to have our heads up in heaven, from whence also we are looking for the Saviour, Christ the Lord. Let us rest on the many infallible proofs, and soon we, too, shall *see* greater things than these.

And so the Lord says to him, “ Thomas, because thou hast seen, thou hast believed : blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” That may serve us for a word when we sit at the table, at a sacrament and ordinance in which the Lord once more is, I may almost say, condescending to our craving after the material, doing Himself, so to speak, what He can to give us something tangible to grip and hold, and something to help us to simpler and to firmer faith.

Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face ;  
 Here do I touch and handle things unseen ;  
 Here grasp with firmer hand th’ eternal grace,  
 And all my weariness upon Thee lean.

May God bless to us for the confirming of our faith this Word preached, and this ordinance now to be dispensed !  
 Amen.



# Regent Square Pulpit.

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HOW DANIEL PROSPERED.

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## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE CHURCH,

BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

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Daniel vi. 10 to 28.

THE sum and substance of all I have to say is, that Daniel's temporal prosperity comes clearly and manifestly from his spiritual fidelity. "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius," says the closing sentence. And thereby hangs a sermon; and it is worth preaching it in London. It is worth while preaching it to such an audience as this, and more especially to the younger portion; and, if I may say so, the portion that is approaching to grave manhood, to matured age—those, in a word, who are just in the thick of this business. What business? The business of finding out in our own experience how this religious profession of ours is going to tell either for or against our material advancement. Or, to put it the other way, how our conduct in the world, our necessary engagements in its commercial and other pursuits and competitions—is going to tell for or against the whole-hearted fidelity with which we shall believe in the Lord our God. All that is vividly illustrated in this crisis in which

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this Jew found himself when he was far away from home. How are we standing? We profess Daniel's faith; only, with this difference, that we ought really to have a more open vision of God and the verities of eternity than Daniel had. For heaven has been more widely opened since his day to the open eye of a believer's soul. It is obvious that, looked at aright, all the difficulty, all the strain and stress that we find ourselves under in this world, because we profess the faith and fear of the God of heaven, who to us has revealed Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ, are meant to develop and not at all to hinder, much less to destroy, that faith and fear. The Christian life is a progress, as it has well been said, through antagonism. How vividly is Daniel an illustration of that somewhat modern way of describing the old, old text, "Fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life." Progress by resistance and antagonism of the keenest kind.

"When Daniel knew," says the verse. That describes the whole crisis—"When Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house: and his windows being opened in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." It is obvious to remark here that, in the case of Daniel, there had been a progression in the trials through which he had come, and he stood this last one so well because he had stood the others. My dear brother or sister, perhaps while I am speaking to you, you feel that this rather describes an unreal experience as yet to you. You have not just yet found that you are in some perilous place, with all heaven on the one hand and all hell on the other hand, with only one step, the taking of which will land you in either of



those directions. Such tug, and strain, and stress, and crisis have not yet come to you. But you are being prepared. Daniel had a simple, a much simpler, and much easier trial before this awful one, which is described in this crucial tenth verse. A good while before this he had been tested on a lower plane—on a much lower level; and he had kept the faith of God and the fear of God there. Therefore, when the awful trial came he stood firm. He was strong in faith; he saved his soul; he gave glory to his God, and great encouragement to all who were to come after him. You remember how, when he came to this same court, and this same strange country, he was tested as regards appetite. He refused with the instinctive feeling of a Jew, and with the instinctive feeling of a consecrated soul. "These Babylonish dishes do not tend either to clearness of head or to cleanness of heart, and I will have nothing to do with them." He is what some would scoff at and describe as over-strict, over-fastidious—too much given to asceticism and to tying himself in where there is no need for such undue restraint. Ah! Daniel, when he refused the king's meat and fell back upon plainer fare and simpler living, was then and there building better than he knew, and gaining a victory which prepares him for gaining this glorious triumph at which all the ages of faith have stood in wonder and thanksgiving to God. So, my lad, when you, in this London, are coming into contact, at its tables and its social gatherings, with highly-seasoned dishes—when you are coming into contact with drink in all its seductively social and attractive forms—now tell me truly, is there not a something in your soul that rises as it rose in the breast of Daniel and the other Hebrew youths who were with him—a kind of unction

from the Holy One, that says, "This is bad"? "I do not want to be straight-laced," you say; "I do not want to seem to be narrow and unsocial," but this I feel instinctively is against grace; it is against purity; it is against the whole-hearted integrity of my soul, in its relation towards God." If you feel that, then, though you may be at a king's table and are offered king's meat, decline it. The Word of God and prayer for your soul, and plain porridge and milk for your body. By these conquer. Keep the body under; and if you are tempted at the outset of your career, if your table is becoming a snare to you, either because it is too full or too bare, find, like your Lord, your deliverance here: "Man shall not live by bread alone." Simple things; but I am strong upon this—that you must take these two narratives together. The narrative of the early temptation and the early trial is bound together with more than simply the binder's stitching, with this narrative of the later temptation and the later victory. The one is recorded because the other was recorded.

"When Daniel knew that the writing was signed he went into his house, and his windows being opened in his chamber," he did as we have described. Notice further, that when once a man, especially a young man in a great city like this—the modern Jew in the modern Babylon—the Christian in London (to dismiss all parabolic speech)—when once a Christian in London gives his heart, his destiny, openly, unreservedly into the hands of a covenant God, his life enters into a wonderful simplicity. Let me dwell upon that for a moment; the wonderful simplicity which is imparted to all our walk and conversation when once we have fought the great battle with ourselves, and yielded ourselves

wholly unto God. Then you have only one thing to do. Blow high or low, come rain or shine, whatever time of the year it be, or whatever be the circumstances in which you are placed, there is only one thing to be done. To me it is the crowning glory of the religion of Jesus Christ; it unites one's heart; you are for ever girt with everlasting strength; one thing in all circumstances, seasons, and places. One thing, and that is in all to keep yourself true to God. Sailing over the sea needs much shifting of the helm, much trimming of the sail. It will not do to be for ever on the one tack. You will run yourself ashore if you are in the Channel and winds suddenly shifting. And if you do not shift your helm your vessel may careen over and go under. But sailing across seas of time and sin to God's haven in eternity is the plainest sailing. Now, I know the objections, but I want to say this right out, it is the plainest sailing imaginable—the very plainest. You have simply all the time to keep on the one tack and set the bow the one way. There is nothing circular; there is nothing ambiguous about it; just one thing to do. See how that is illustrated in the very wording of our narrative. Let us try to get below the letter that kills into the Spirit that gives life.

“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed.” Just let us think a moment. There is a man whose life is threatened. If ever a man was cordially hated, it was Daniel. He was the best hated man in the city, and those who hated him were not fools. They were clever, they were cunning, they were long-headed, they were far-seeing. They baited the trap so skilfully that even king Darius jumped at it, and Darius was no fool either, but they fooled him. They put Darius in a trap. They utterly failed to put Daniel in one, but they were so cunning and

craftily skilful, that in their determination to bring down Daniel, "this Daniel," they laid this trap. They laid their heads together, they consulted, they drew up a flattering address to the king. They went to the king, and to the king's shame be it said, he showed himself for the moment a most unkingly man. He swallowed the flattery. Not long afterwards it sadly disagreed with him, and he fain would have got rid of it. It was taken down, and things were shaped and set agoing for the destruction of Daniel. Then says this bristling, vivid narrative, the knowledge of all that is brought to Daniel ; and then you see how Daniel is so much different from nine-tenths of us, I sadly fear : "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed," he went into his chamber, and he sat down on his chair, and said to himself, "Ah, I am in for it now. Let me see, now ; how can I circumvent these devils ? How can I meet craft with craft, and cunning with cunning. They have had cards up their sleeves ? Can I not trump this game ? " It was a strong temptation for a long-headed clever Jew like Daniel. Remember that he was a Jew, belonging to the most cunning race of men on earth. This was a descendant of Jacob. Remember that the temptation, therefore, for him was to meet craft with craft—to go and consult with Mr. Worldly Wiseman, with Mr. Carnal Policy, and to say, "Now, here is your retainer ; do your best. I would like to hoist these men with their own petard. Come away. Let us fall upon some scheme to frustrate their devices." And the remarkable thing is that Daniel, the clever man, seems to have no notion of trying craft or cleverness. "When Daniel knew"—when he was in that high and awful crisis of his soul—"When he knew that the writing was signed"—when he knew the devilish ingenuity and

malignity with which, at last, his enemies had closed upon him, and, humanly speaking, had him in their grip—"When he knew"—that is the shining line in the narrative—when he knew that these hell-hounds were sniffing round about the door to hear the voice of his prayer and to rush at once to the king and demand that, according to the decree, Daniel should be put into the lions' den—when he knew it all, calmly, simply, and, as the wise ones of the world would be sure to say, like a born idiot—when he knew that, if he prayed, they would be listening, and would see him and hear him—he went away and did it. In the name of reason and common sense, what kind of creature is a Christian? A wonderful creature; yea, a new creation. "*When he knew.*" My brethren, it is not otherwise with us than it was with Daniel. The world still says, "We could put up with these Christians well enough if it were not for their Christianity." It can find no occasion against us except in the law of our God; and the world wants by night and day, under the power of the god of this world, to cut that thread that binds us to the unseen and eternal God. It has got the secret of our strength. These men got to know and see that Daniel was the man he was, as a man on intellectual and governmental grounds, because he was true to his God. They saw that God was the strength of his mind, as well as the name upon his tongue in worship. They had got more than a dim glimmering that that which lifted Daniel above them and made him worthy of the promotion which he got was this: that in and through that religion of his he got a mental stimulus which they lacked. He was united, girt about, always going in one direction, and had not half a dozen plans and policies to distract him and land him in the ditch through their miscarriage.

“When he knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house.” If they had come in Darius’s name to say that Darius had abdicated the throne and wished to make him a present of the crown, he would just have done the same thing. He would have gone into his house and prayed and thanked his God. They had come to watch against him for his destruction, but he had one thing to do. We get that repeated again at the mouth of the great Apostle. “This one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind, I press toward the mark.” If you *will* creep and crawl round a Christian’s back, you have God to reckon with. God is behind him. If you will go forward and lie in ambush in front of him, to bring him down when he comes forward, you have God to reckon with, for God besets him behind *and before*. If you lie here behind the hedge, and shoot at him as he goes past, you have God to reckon with, for He is upon his right hand and upon his left hand. A Christian has only one thing to do. “Forgetting the things that are behind, to reach forth unto those that are before;” and he must disregard everything that comes against him as he seeks in the way of whole-hearted consecration to live for God and for eternity, and to do his duty in the world, making God his mark, and his way, and his end, and being utterly done with man-pleasing. If you live thus, and if I live thus, God will defend us, and God will honour us, as he did with Daniel.

“His windows being opened in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed as before.” We may here remark that this Daniel was a man of prayer. I like to preach it to myself, as well as to the young men and the middle-aged men who are here. The cry often is to-day “Oh, well, you see, I am too busy to pray. It is all very well for you, preacher, to stand up there and talk. You may go into your study and pray. You may be able to command your own time. If you were a man of the world (in the innocent sense)—if you were



down in the world, and if you knew what city life meant, you would never dream of preaching to city men about having praying habits." Now I am putting it very freely, because I like really to bring the thing out and know where we are. Is not that a pretty free, straight interpretation of no small amount of whispering that goes on in our hearts? Now, listen. To tell the truth, some of you are not just so over-burdened with business as you pretend. You pull long faces, and you draw your hand across your forehead, and you talk about "the City," and "down in the City," and "City cares." But they sit very lightly on some of you, all things considered. You are not so vastly over-wearied and over-pushed as the common talk would indicate. I have heard of a preacher who says that he is considerably tired trying to give sympathy to poor harassed City men who drive down to business at half-past ten in the morning, and drive home again at half-past three in the evening. There is a good deal of that. I also admit that there is a good deal of the other; and I speak to those to whom daily life is a whirl, to whom daily life is a great tax upon body, and brain, and nervous system, and every power, in fact, that is in you. And, speaking especially to such, I would like to lift up Daniel. Daniel was a busy man. Daniel was a prime minister. Daniel really had the government upon his shoulders. You may be quite sure of it that he got his promotion because he deserved it. It was through no mere favouritism to a stranger and a foreigner of a hated race that Daniel rose to this high position. He got to the top because there was room for him there, and he climbed up by dint of merit. He was the man worthiest of the position, and the king found it out and put him there. That meant a great deal of work; that would have meant a great deal of worry. The whole administration fell upon him. You can imagine how, day by day, officers of state, servants higher or lower, were continually coming to this

pivot man, this Daniel, who was the hinge of the administration of the realm. Yet that is the man who found time three times a day to kneel down upon his knees and pray to the God of Heaven. That sets me out on this subject of method ; and the obvious thing that I am going to say about method is that the best method for the working of a heavy business, for getting through a heavy day's work, is *to be a man of prayer*. If you want to get through a heavy day's work, have this principle within you. I do not say that you must have set time and place, but have within your soul this principle of prayer which ever and anon, as the rush and congestion of business comes in upon you, erects itself and says, "Order ! Stand off ! Stand back ! Do not rush in upon me and overwhelm me. One thing at a time, please." The principle of prayer, the principle of communion with God, must have a tremendous power to reduce to order the rush that comes upon an extra busy man. I have used before this illustration, perhaps. Down in our streets, where the traffic is apt to be congested, and to get into a hopeless coil, there stands a policeman. When these men were first appointed, I think they were called "fixed points." I think that is the technical name of that excellent official still. He is not a man who has got a beat to go round. He is a man who has simply to stop there. There he stands down at the Mansion House yonder, or at some other rushing, congested place, and all he has to do is to stand and make all the traffic of this London to swing round about him ; and if you were the very Lord Mayor, with all your jinglings and all your trappings, and if a costermonger is in first, you have to stand back and take your turn. You have not to go rushing over him, no matter who you are, and no matter what you are. You are to get past when the policeman lifts up his hand. You had better stop and wait till he fetches you forth, or you may land yourself at the police-court, where you did not mean to go. Now, I often think that that serves to illustrate

Daniel's method. This principle of prayer—this fixed habit of communion with God—is like the policeman at a busy crossing. It compels, as I have said, all the rush and all the chaos of the day's engagements to stand back. You master them, instead of them mastering you. This is your principle—that everything must find its place round about your praying habits. You are not going to adopt the principle that you will pray when you get time. No! no! Then you have surrendered. The praying, the communion with God, is to be set up and conserved strictly all the day through, and everything else is to shape itself round that. Humanly speaking, that was one side of Daniel's victory. I believe that the man—for he was as human as we are on one side—might have been tempted to say, "What am I to do? Where am I to turn? I will run away to Darius, and I will get his ear, and I will try to put sense into him, and I will show him this plot that these men have entered into, and I will ask him, Why should my life be in danger? Have I done him or his kingdom any harm? Have I not toiled for their best interests night and day?" That would have been his undoing; and I suppose that it was just because his time for prayer had arrived that he was delivered. He said to himself, "It is my time for withdrawing, and I will withdraw. I will go in before God. That is the thing to do now, and as to the next thing, I leave that to Him." Oh, business men! prayer has far more to do with successful method than most of us imagine. Consecrated business men will very likely be methodical men. They are. Thank God we have lives written, and others are being written, which illustrate this—that the faith and fear of Jesus Christ practically held, especially during the working hours of the day, has procured commercial advancement and renown.

"He knelt upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime." Dwell a moment upon that. He gave thanks. Oh, men

and women, think of it! Think of that hunted, badgered, persecuted man on that critical day going in before his God, and saying, "My God, I thank Thee!" Many would say, "Thank Him for what? What had that man to thank God for?" That is what the devil comes and whispers to some young fellow here who would like to be a Christian. "What is it going to bring you? Self-denial, the nails of crucifixion, keeping yourself in and keeping yourself back, and missing all the glory and all the show." Not so here. If you give your heart, my brother, to Jesus Christ, you will never be without cause of thankfulness, in the midst of all difficulty especially, and in the midst of all trial, and just on the brink of great adversities seemingly. You will never be so conscious as then of the nearness of God's presence, and of the absolute safety that you have in your covenant God. In some awful day of crisis that is coming, when eternity will hang on the wise decision of some five minutes of time, you will realize what Daniel realized, that the man who has given himself to God, *and fears God only*, need have no other fear. Daniel was as good as dead to these men. He was as good as dead to all thoughts of policy and self-preservation. He was so alive to God and to the things of eternity that he let the world go. It is wonderful how in the course of Providence that is the man to whom the world comes. Treat the world like Daniel, with a kind of contempt; show the world that you are indifferent to it; and the world will be sneaking at your feet like a dog. But go grasping at the world, and set yourself on the world, and make eternity to depend upon time, and you will miss both. This was a man who, to worldly wisdom, flung himself away; flung away his situation, with all its emoluments and all its glories; but he got it back to him with a firmer grasp than ever. Says the old distich,

"There was a man, and some did count him mad,  
The more he flung away, the more he had."

Did you ever know a man like that? The most of us, I fear, are the other way. We grasp and covet, and knock the hearts and the life out of ourselves trying to keep it in. "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life for My sake shall keep it unto life eternal." There is some lad here—my heart goes out to you—in your own small way, my brother, you are tempted as Daniel was tempted. Time and its prospects are *here*; eternity and its awards are *here*. Down there, in your warehouse, the temptation is this, to let eternity, God, conscientiousness, faithfulness, a bold stand, go to the one side, and, in order to secure your situation, in order to keep yourself in "a good crib," or to get a better one, to become a little less conscientious, and to become less Christian and more of "a business man," as the phrase is; to say: "Well, you know, we are here, and business is business, and it is in this world every man for himself. I do not see that I am called upon to resist in this strenuous fashion." God strengthen you to-day, my brother. No man who ever professed in London, or anywhere else, the simple, solemn, purifying faith of the God of heaven, but was tempted precisely in his measure as Daniel was in that awful crisis. I have named the temptation already—to sell eternity for time, and to fasten my attention on earthly considerations: myself, my wife, my salary, my family; and how these will be affected by my faithfulness to God and conscience. And it seems hard, does it not? that I should stand here and say, "You are not to think of yourself. Let the wife of your bosom, and the children of your love, be as though they were dead and buried out of your sight when you come to a crisis like this. Look to God and eternity, and let these decide." If it should be like cutting off your right hand, let it go. If it should be like plucking out your right eye, let it go. It is better to enter into life maimed: without the hand, without feet, without the eye—it is better to enter into life a



bankrupt rather than a merchant prince, if it is because I have yielded myself to the God of heaven; it is better to enter into life bare, empty, than, having two eyes and two hands and two feet, and having obtained the reputation of a successful merchant, to be cast into hell because I denied God to gain my temporal success, and therefore He also has denied me.

That is all there. It was a crisis, and heaven or hell turned upon Daniel's conduct in that hour. Policy would have ruined him. Compromise would have ruined him in this rugged and awful crisis of the soul. He might have kept his religion to himself. He might have said, "I will go through the outward form, but God knows my heart. I will keep my heart as sacred to the God of Israel as ever." No, that cannot be done; and the awful whisper in your heart and mine, my brother and sister, is that it can be done, and we will do it. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." But we will try. We will try, although heaven with thundering emphasis says, Ye cannot. Daniel could not, and Daniel was about as long-headed as any of us. Daniel could not, I do not think that you can. You are not clever enough, if he could not; and it never occurred to him as being worth the trying.

"He gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." How much we have to thank God for, especially in the hours of trial, in the times of bitterness, when the world seems to be against us, and when the pathway of faith that leads to God seems to be rocky and thorny, and makes our feet to bleed. Even then, yea, never more than then, let us abound in thanksgiving. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing that the trial of your faith, though it be tried with fire, shall be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

Hold on. "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." If you are a believer in Jesus Christ,



remember that already a crown is upon your head. Man, play your part well. Do not demean the position that you occupy. Stand up for God and for the right, and do not flinch a hair's-breadth. Remember Him who has said, "I am with you to deliver you. There shall not a hair of your head perish"—and some of us have got a lot of them to keep. "There shall not a hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls." Put up your hand to your head, young brother, and lay hold of a whole handful of certificates of Jehovah's faithfulness and truth.

And so it was with Daniel. I can imagine somebody saying, "Well now, brethren, suppose, now—suppose the lions had killed him." What then? He still would have won. That is what then. He still had won. Do you not see there is absolutely no defeat? "They never fail who die in a great cause." *Via crucis via lucis*; the way of the cross is the way of light. If you are whole-hearted towards God, there is no defeat. Down is up and black is bright. "All things work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to His purpose." There is John the Baptist. Because he was faithful to God and faithful to conscience, his head rolled off the block into the basket; and, with all our Bible teaching, we are so worldly that we are inclined to say, "Oh, what a disaster!" Disaster? What do we mean? Where is the disaster? If Daniel had gone straight to heaven, and if John the Baptist went into a country where, in order to see things in their true light, you do not need your head, what is the loss? What harm has come to him? Do not raise the objection, "Suppose the lions had killed him." It would have been just the carrying out of God's programme all the same. I think it was Henry Ward Beecher who put it, "You kill a good man, and you think that you have thereby wreaked your spite upon him, and you have won. To kill a good man is very much the same as if one would try to spite a ship by launching it. The ship, although

built on the land, was meant for the ocean, and the good man's soul was meant for heaven, and blessed is the stroke that gives each to its true element." Again, I say, there is no reverse, there is no possible disaster in any true sense, to the man who, like Daniel, has just one thing to do—to kneel down upon his knees in the high and awful crisis of his history to give thanks to God.

May the spirit of Daniel be breathed into us, especially in these loose, and slack, and compromising times. May we be enabled, by clear and simple faith, to see things in the light of eternity. May we set the Lord always before us; and when we are tempted to spiritual wickedness, or any kind of departure from the living God, may we be able to say, with another, in the awful hour of his temptation, when any attempt at compromise or shilly-shallying would have been his ruin, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Fear God, and have no other fear. Some of us have to learn that yet. O my brother, I close with Christ's solemn words. You are afraid of man. You are afraid of lifting up a clear and solemn testimony for Jesus Christ. "I will forewarn you whom you shall fear." Fear not those round about you in your companionship, who live with you, who will sneer at you, who will scoff at you, but "fear Him who hath power to cast soul and body into hell, yea"—if fear is to enter into your calculations—"fear Him."

May God strengthen us, by His word and His Spirit, to play the man!

# Regent Square Pulpit.

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ABOUT THE "GREAT WOMAN."

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## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE CHURCH,

BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

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2 Kings iv.

You remember when I began one evening, the subject of this Shunammite woman, I tried to use a recurring key-note or refrain in exposition of this woman's character and history. The Bible calls her "a great woman," and instead of turning back to the Hebrew dictionary to find out some special and peculiar meaning of the adjective which, perhaps, it does not bear in our ordinary English, we rather thought we should go down through the narrative to find the woman's greatness illustrated in the story which is subtended, under that designation. "Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman." We saw that surely part of her greatness lay in the fact that she was swift to see and swift to act upon an opportunity when it came her way. She did not know this Elisha, this wayfaring man, who passed by her, but, being a woman of great instincts, Vo II.—No. 16.

she laid hold of him, scarcely understanding why, and constrained him to pass into her house and eat bread. Out of that idea, swiftly conceived and swiftly carried out by this great woman, there came all the subsequent marvels of her life's history. Then we also tried to see that she deserved the expression, "a great woman," because she was great in perception of character. She said one day to her husband. "Behold, now I perceive that this is a holy man of God, who passes by us continually." Elisha came and went, and he seems to have said nothing to her as to whom and what he was—though really he was greater in Israel than its king and court and army. He was "the chariot of Israel and the horseman thereof." But he was going about in lowly guise, and it was only a great woman who had eyes to see and a heart to feel his greatness. She said "this is a holy man of God who passes by us continually."

Following the same line of exposition, I think we have another gleam of her greatness in the thirteenth verse. Elisha was going to reward her; and he said, What shall I do? "Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people." This is one of those gems of Scriptural utterance which to hear once (I had almost said) is to remember for ever. "I dwell among mine own people." What did she mean? Well, I think that when she said that, there comes out another great thing in this woman.

She was great in her simplicity. *Sancta simplicitas!* "I dwell among mine own people." Elisha, I have done well by you, and you would reward me? Elisha, understand

that many of the tinsel rewards that come to my neighbours would be no rewards to me. I have no desire to take any kind of gift of you if it will mean that I have to leave the farm—if it is to mean that I have to leave these rural sights and rural sounds in the midst of which I have passed all my days, and which become dearer and sweeter to me the longer I live. If your kindness means dangerous promotion—if I and my husband are to be brought near to kings and courts, and all that gilded throng, thank you, but I must decline. I am quite content. I dwell among mine own people. I have as much here, in one way, as my heart can wish. As for this world's goods and gear, this world's rewards and ambitions, I have no liking for them.

This was a roundabout way, which was most direct to serve the purpose, of saying "I am content." Now, I am not to stand before an audience of driving business men, ambitious young men and young women, before old men, too, whose honourable ambitions are not extinct, and need not be, and say that ambition is wrong, that ambition is sinful, and that the Gospel means that we are to look round upon our little patrimony or little present estate, whatever it may be, and seek to know nothing more and to go no farther. No, no. And yet I am here to preach this woman's gospel of contentment with our lot. Do not let us have the ambition that makes us beat ourselves like a bird against the bars of a cage. Let us rather have the contentment that makes us sing, though our lot should be rather narrow and circumscribed.

"A little bird I am,  
 Shut from the fields of air ;  
 Yet in the cage I sit and sing  
 To him that placed me there,  
 Well pleased his prisoner to be,  
 Since, O my God, it pleaseth Thee."

"I dwell among mine own people." A poet of a bygone age brings out this holy simplicity, this holy contentment, with one's lot, by setting a woman like this over against one of the world's great and shining lights, with all his ambition, his earthly pomp and glory :

"Yon cottager who sits at her own door,  
 Pillow and bobbins all her little store."

The poet lifts her up and puts her over against the infidel, Voltaire, altogether to his disadvantage.

"Content though mean, and cheerful if not gay,  
 Shuffling her threads about the livelong day,  
 Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night  
 Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light.  
 Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true,  
 A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew ;  
 And in that charter reads with sparkling eyes  
 Her title to a treasure in the skies."

Then he goes on still further to bring out the greatness of her littleness and the littleness of Voltaire's greatness. Says the poet,—

"He praised, perhaps, for ages yet to come,  
 She never heard of, half a mile from home ;  
 He lost in errors, his vain heart prefers,  
 She safe in the simplicity of hers."

Ay, my hearers, even while I speak, are there not some of your hearts that are throbbing within you, and are you not saying, "Preacher, it would have been very much better for me to-day if I had stayed out in the country;—if I had not yielded to my own, or my husband's, or my young son's



ambition, to leave the country with its dulness and crampedness, and come into the great city, where we should have room and scope for great energies and restless longings? "Yes, preacher," you say, "we have got on, we have been promoted, we are coming up, and up, and up. We have left the small ways of the simple country folk a long bit behind. True, we began in a room and kitchen, and now we can hardly tell just right off how many rooms we have? *But are you better off, my friend?* Now, in all honesty and sincerity, before God and these people, are you better off? Are you really happier? Are you really more contented? You have got promotion, you have got elevation in a worldly and earthly sense. Has it not meant increased sorrow and increased bitterness? "I dwell among mine own people;" and when she said that, she said a great word, which some of us have not yet been able conscientiously to say, "I am dead to the world. I am dead to its offers, its pomps and glories." May God breathe into us the same great contentment.

She *had* one wish. She would not even say it; for this woman was great in her capacity to hold in, great in her power to carry about within her what was a heavy burden, and to keep it locked up in her breast, and not tell it to every gad-about whom she met. Great to keep her own counsel, and to keep herself within herself. She was a self-contained woman, and part of her greatness lay there.

However, the unspoken wish of her heart was interpreted. Gehazi said, "She has no child, and her husband is old," and to her great surprise *that* was granted to her by the

Lord. "She bore a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life."

There is one great lesson out of this woman's story, and it cannot be preached too often. How often is divine contentment the quickest road to that which otherwise you may struggle for and not obtain. Let go, and you get. Grasp, and you lose. Fill your soul with yearning, and struggling, and striving, and go about with your brows knitted and saying, "Oh, life is a weariness to me, for that which I desire, its crown and flower, never comes to me," and it will not come. But come away from that yearning and striving, and take the other plan and say, "Well, God knoweth best, and if it is to be it will come to me; and if it is not to be, I have Him. See what I have. May I rest more upon what I have than upon what I have not." Then you will grow strong and brave in the midst of seeming desolation, and you will be able to say with the apostle, "I have all and abound"—a man who had to be looked after, or he might have perished for lack of earthly supplies. "I have all and abound; and I have learnt in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content." And this woman, travelling in the greatness of her simplicity, arrived at that which otherwise she never could have had. It came to pass, according to the word spoken by Elisha, that in the fulness of time she had a son lying in her bosom. Ay, and the day is coming if we will only trust God—if we will cease our wild regrets, our vain longings, which have in them not simplicity, but oftentimes no little fault and sin—if we will only have more trust in God we shall be satisfied.

"Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thy heart." "What do you say, preacher? Why, sir, if you only knew, what the great big desire of my heart is, you would scarcely dare to utter that scripture." I do not utter it. It is God. God knows all that these hearts of ours can desire, and He dares to say, "Delight thyself in Me. Make Me thy portion, and I will give thee what seem to be the wildest desires of thy heart."

"And when the child was grown it fell on a day that he went out to his father and to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother." He had been struck by the sun. We read, "And when he had taken him and brought him to his mother he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me I pray thee one of the young men and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God and come again. And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to-day? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath. And she said, Peace. So she went and came unto the man of God to Mount Carmel." Along our line of exposition, I think that this woman shows herself to be great again with a greatness which all God's saints should covet and seek to have. She was great when she passed through a very severe trial. "It came to pass when the child was grown." Then came the stroke. In speaking the other morning of the son of the widow of Nain, we dwelt for a little on that thought—how death seems sometimes by the Lord to be per-

mitted to do things against us in a peculiarly heart-breaking way. Death comes to our family, not when that hopeful one is a mere infant of days, and we might get over it, but just at the most painful time—as here, when this child, who had been so wonderfully bestowed, was grown. Just then this reaper put in his sickle, and cut him down.

“There is a reaper whose name is Death,  
And with his sickle keen  
He reaps the bearded grain at a breath,  
And the flowers that grow between.”

This woman had to drink of that cup; and how bitter that cup is, let woman here, and men too who have had to drink it, stand up and testify. And she drank it, and she drank it well. Even when there was this thought working in her heart, —“I will go to Elisha, and I will ask, what means this?”—she had this added pain of finding that her husband seemingly was not one with her. I wonder if it falls often to the lot of great women to be married to little men. For he looks little when he looks at her. She got no help. Her husband would rather have dragged her down to his own little level. And oh! how tame a book the Kings would have been without the chapter which this great woman put into it. When she went to her husband, he said, “Wherefore wilt thou go to him to-day? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath.” And she said—What? If she had been less than the great woman that she was, her heart would have given way, and she would have burst out upon him, and very likely spoken unadvisedly with her tongue. She would have rated him soundly, perhaps. She would have said some stinging things, and the sting of every one of them

would have lain in its truth. She would have shown him in that awful hour, when she broke out upon him in the soreness of her distress, what a small man he was. She would have shown him how little contented him. But she showed her greatness again by holding in, and she simply said, "Peace." Ah, friends, sometimes some of us should try that way. Our husband fails us, our wife fails us. Those who knows us best and see us oftenest in the time of our sorest need, we seek their faces, and heaven help us! Their faces are as blank as the stones on the street. They do not understand us. We get no help. All they have got to say is only the more a tax upon us. They seem to be standing back to back with us, instead of face to face; looking away in an altogether opposite direction. Well for us, then, if we hold ourselves in, and resist the temptation to speak foolishly with our tongues. Every heart knows its own bitterness, and there is a joy also with which no one can intermeddle. Let us seek after the heavenly Elisha in our troubles, in our dangerous joys and dangerous sorrows. Let us seek to Him and to Him alone. He is there. He will understand us, and especially if we find that our nearest and dearest are failing us, let us ride forward all the more swiftly to the only One who can comprehend accurately all that weighs upon our spirits. "So she went and came unto the man of God to Mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi, his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite. Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the

child? And she answered, It is well." The old Hebrew word is *Shalom*—peace. "And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet; but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her; and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me. Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, Do not deceive me?" I would not have liked to meet that Shunammite woman just then unless I had been all that Elisha was before God and man. "Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again." Oriental salutations are long performances, which to us are rather ludicrous. "If any salute thee, answer him not again; and lay my staff upon the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose and followed her, and Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice nor hearing."

In the beginning of our exposition of this great woman's life and character, I said that one of her greatneses was her power of apprehending or perceiving character. You see how she found out Elisha. "Behold," she says, "this is a holy man of God. I detect the superior flavour, the subtle aroma of his soul's holiness, as I come and go, in my contact with him, in giving him his daily bread." Now, again, I have to repeat that remark. I shall look closely at these verses which I have read. I must hurry over a great



deal that is worth speaking about, because I want to make the woman stand as a type and specimen of what faith in all of us might be. Again you find the greatness of her character. Look you carefully through these verses which I have read, and you will find that the great woman found out Gehazi before Elisha did. I tell you, Heaven help you when you come under the eyes of a woman like this if you are not genuine through and through. You will be discovered, and what I said before I repeat again : it is in the ordination of God's providence that long before the judgment day we are made to pass under the eyes of keenly discriminating men and women, great women and great men, not censorious, not suspicious ; no, but large generous hearts, and just because they are so large, they cannot help seeing us. If there is a wooden bit in you, they will see it. If there is a dark or dirty bit, they will find it out, not because they are censorious, not because they are for ever like flies buzzing about a sore spot ; but because they are truly great. This woman found out Gehazi before Elisha did. She virtually said to Elisha, " You can send that man with his staff wherever you like ; but as the Lord liveth, and as your soul liveth, I will not leave you. I found out that man, Elisha, the same time that I found out you. When you lodged with me I found out both of you. I found out you to be true and genuine. I did not like him then, and I like him less to-day. When I came in the soreness of my grief, and laid hold of you by the feet, he—this thing that is about you, came and put me away, and you would send me off with him. Never ! I

will have you or nobody. Send the man with the stick wherever you like, but as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." Great woman. Underline that eighth verse in your Bible with a deep underline. "*A great woman.*" Yes, she was great. Great, again I say, in her perception of character. Says the Scripture, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things." If we were more filled with the mind of Christ, and more filled with the Spirit of Christ, we should be less imposed upon either by men or ministers. If we had more of the mind of Christ—if we were greater than we are—there would be less loud outcry because a hypocrite runs along his course undetected for a very long time, and then is found out. Hypocrites would be found out sooner. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Every tree is known by its fruit," said He, who also said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." He said there is a more excellent way, look narrowly; do not judge, but look. "Every tree is known by its fruit. There is no need of being a judge, and getting up on the bench, and making all people pass before you as you sit on the judgment-seat, and give your verdicts; but the open eye, the wise and understanding heart, and the natural comings and goings with our fellow men will bring to us this knowledge. By their fruits ye shall know the difference between Elisha and Gehazi. They are very close together, and you would think that they were virtually engaged in the same service, and yet one is a child of light and the day, and the other is a child and servant of darkness and of the night. Wherefore by their

fruits ye shall know them. She knew Gehazi, and she turned from him with a whole-hearted turn instinctively. "I will not leave thee."

Apart altogether from the particular cause that made her turn away from Gehazi, this great woman is to be commended here. This privilege, shall I say, all the saints have. There is somebody sitting here, and the sorrow is big within you, and nobody can give you any comfort. I am only speaking words without knowledge. Dear tried soul, rise in the greatness of your trouble, and scatter to right and left each seneschal and page among us, and go right in and on and up until you come to THE MAN OF GOD HIMSELF, for nothing less than Christ will serve you. Have Him, then, and Him only. That is the privilege that is open to all souls in the greatness of their need. And especially in these days when a class of men is re-appearing among us who want to be Gehazis; they want to stand between us and Elisha, and we are to deal with them, and with them only, and we are to have judgment passed upon our case and upon our need by them; and it is only in proportion as they will allow us that we shall get near to the fountain and source of all comfort and salvation. In these days, when these creatures are creeping in again, have an eye in your head to see them and know them. Last Sabbath morning I was compelled to speak, as Christ himself would have me speak, about the Priest and the Levite; and we are back just here again. Genuine or real, let me say again, put us on one side if we do not seem to serve you. If we do not seem to serve the greatness of your need, even when we

try to do it, go straight to Christ Himself. Be like the old farmer in my country who wanted to go and see the landlord, for he had to complain about the heaviness of his rent, and he would not be put off with any factor: he would not be put off with any underling, and he said, in his round, broad Scotch, "I maun see the laird himsel'." So said the great woman of our text. So let all our hearts say when sore pangs and heavy griefs lie upon us. Neither man, nor official, nor angel, nor archangel has any right to stand between you at this minute to hinder you from going right up to the Son of God, and grasping Him, and saying, "I will not leave Thee."

"And he arose and followed her." Oh, that we might be baptised with this woman's faith! We can go no farther now. At another time we shall see how this wonderful drama unfolds itself with deepening, with breathless interest. We pause here where the narrative makes a pause for us. "Elisha rose and followed her." "The effectual, fervent prayer of a great woman availeth much."

Like this woman, let us stand here and realize how near to us our Elisha has come, and that it is our high privilege and prerogative—and let no priest, no servant of the Master, keep us from the exercise of it—to go straight in before the King Himself, and deal with Him at first hand. We have a greater than Elisha, and with this thought I close. Elisha had to stand and say, "Let her alone, for her soul is vexed within her, and the Lord hath hid it from me." There were some things that even Elisha did not know. As you read through some of these wonderful

narratives of Old Testament times, and find out what the prophets were to poor and distressed people, you are apt to say, "Well, after all, is the New Testament brighter than the Old? Had not the Old Testament saints a grip of something tangible and real? Had not they an advantage that we have not? Oh, if there were only an Elijah living! If there were only an Elisha living to-day!" Ah, my friends, we are living, after all, under a greater dispensation. Elisha was compelled to say, "The Lord hath hid it from me." He had to confess limitation; and, says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, these great prophets, these great priests, these great meditators of a bygone age, were not suffered to continue by reason of death. Out of that he works the argument which I am seeking to apply now to you—the greater blessing that has come to us in our heavenly, although invisible, Prophet and Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. When I read this about Elisha—"the Lord hath not told it me," I feel inclined to say to him, "Good-bye, Elisha. Great and all as you are, you will not serve my turn. Great and all as you are, I need one, after all, from whom nothing is hid—from whom nothing can be hid. Good-bye, Elisha. You are a wonderful man. You could do wonderful things; but I can bid you good-bye without a tear. I can bear to see you disappear from the stage of time, because He has come from whom nothing is hid; who is mightier than all Elijahs and Elishas and prophets put together." "Consider the Apostle and Priest of our profession." Think of Him who stands, it may be, unknown, unperceived to-day in the midst of this assembly;

for mole-eyed men and women, groping down in the earth, do not see Him and do not know Him. The Lord of Life and Glory, Jesus Christ, stands with us, and, when we see Him, even Elisha's glory begins to dim and fade away. We are better off than the Shunammite. We are better off than the widow who went to Elisha, and had her dead restored to life. We have a greater than they had, One than whom none greater can be, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who has come to us, and who abides with us for ever and for ever, having an unchangeable priesthood, an unchangeable mediatorship. "Wherefore He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him, for He ever liveth to make intercession for them."

Dear soul, come to the Great Prophet of the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ, and know, as you come, that nothing is hidden from Him, and that His power and His love are co-extensive with His knowledge. May God bless the preaching of His Word!





# Regent Square Pulpit.

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ALL HOPE GONE; YET LANDED SAFE.

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## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE CHURCH,

BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

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TEXT—Acts xxvii.

I CAN almost fancy I see the smile coming across your face that I am preventing from coming across my own, at the outward discrepancy between our subject and our surroundings this morning. The darkness and tempest of this 27th chapter, and the summer sunshine and cheeriness of this June Sabbath morning, seem to stand at opposite poles. And yet it has been laid upon me to preach this subject. I have been, during the past evenings, a good deal out about our streets; I see the great tide, especially of young life, that flows along the main thoroughfares of this great city; and this subject has been borne in upon me. I thought that this morning, when we have so much young life present, I would take it up, that it might be the means of causing us, especially those who are young, to take our reckoning, to look to our ways, and ask ourselves how it fares with us as we are voyaging across these seas of time and sin.

Life is a voyage. All the poets say it. But without the poets at all, it is almost no parable; it is almost no poetic figure of speech. Those of us who never wrote a line of

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poetry find ourselves speaking of life in somewhat of the phraseology of this 27th chapter. Although perhaps we have never been to sea at all, we find ourselves expressing our experiences in terms of the sea and sea-faring life. And perhaps out of the very opposites that exist, as between our subject here and our bright and fair surroundings this morning, there may come something to help us. "Calm seas have their dangers," says the hymn, "Mariner, beware!"

We may begin at the tenth verse: "Paul said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul." Now, here in these words, I am brought face to face with those among us who are in danger of spoiling life's journey, and of coming to irremediable shipwreck in the end, simply because of the great vice of youth—headiness, hot-headedness, high-mindedness, impatience of advice, impatience of the control of those who know more about stormy days and stormy nights than you do—older mariners who have read the face of the sky longer than you have done, who know more about what life means to-day, and to-morrow, and the next day, than you can possibly do. I am speaking this morning to young men and young women, but while I speak to them, am I not carrying the sad sympathies and the sad memories of older men and women with me? Are there not grey heads who could stand up at this very hour, and almost take the preaching out of the preacher's mouth, and say, "Preacher, let me speak now. Even you are too young to bring home with all the emphasis that I could, what I see is to be the

drift of your teaching for young men and young women out of this subject this morning." My aged friends, those of you who have sad and bitter memories because you would not take advice, but despised instruction and hated reproof in your earlier years, send up to God the silent but earnest prayer that while I speak there may be given to me wit and wisdom beyond even yours or mine—Divine power to arrest the giddy, the thoughtless, and the self-sufficient, and to make them on this calm, quiet June Sabbath morning to give up their own plans, and call Him on board, who is the Great Pilot of this awful main.

Dear young friends, *two voices are in your ears*. There is mine. I speak on behalf of Scripture, I speak on behalf of myself, I speak on behalf of all those who are wise with bought wit, as people say—with bought wit, which is the best. I speak on behalf of those who have got their experience by bitter shame and sorrow. I speak on behalf of God and of the Word of God, and of wise people, when I so speak. Life, my young friends, is not what it seems to be to you. Life is not a sailing under fair skies and across tranquil seas, until you shall drop your anchor in Fair Havens at the end. Life is not a yachting excursion through the many-islanded Mediterranean, or round the creeks and bays of our lovely shores. Life is not sailing up and down some romantic Clyde, or still more romantic Rhine. Life means being out on the open sea ; life means roughing it ; life means storm ; life means fog ; life means unsightly mud banks on which you may run and be stranded. Life means roaring reefs and sunken rocks. Life means (to change the metaphor) snares and traps set with devilish skill for unwary feet, all round about. "Sirs," says the preacher, says Paul, says God Himself,

"I perceive that this voyage is to mean trouble, and distress, and trial, do as we may and go as we may."

This was said, remember, while they were still in the harbour; "In any case, our voyage is to mean trouble, and trial, and hardship." And I say the same. Oh, it is unwelcome; it is irksome doctrine. Time was when I do not think that I believed it myself. Time was when life seemed—well, what could our ideas of life be, my young friend, other than just what we gathered from those books we read, those novels that were continually in our hands. Life was to be an adventure, a glorious adventure. Life was to be romance. Life was to be success, and joy, and gladness. Hear it, although it may seem to be a wet blanket flung over your romancing spirit, your enthusiastic soul: "Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives." We shall be barely saved, if we are saved at all—saved by the skin of our teeth, and we shall land on the eternal shore with nothing but what we stand in.

I quite believe, although I do not hear your controverting voice, that there is a feeling of somewhat angry contemptuous controversy in your heart, even while I speak. So was it on this occasion, on this parabolic voyage. "Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul." That is where the other of the two voices comes in. They would prophesy smooth things. Of course, they would be for pushing on. They were business men, "men of the world." "Let us get forward. We cannot be kept back by this gloomy old grey-beard, this Paul. Let every man stick to his trade. Let every

man keep to his calling. Paul, you are a propagandist of some kind or another. Keep to your propaganda. We know more about trading, and about sailing, than you do. If you were speaking about your own subject, we might listen to you; but upon this subject you know nothing. You are ignorant and inexperienced, and we did not bring you on board to be our sailing-master." Is it not with something of a tone like that that that young people are apt to listen to the warnings of wiser heads? Yea, to the secret solemn whisperings and warnings of God's voice speaking by His Word and Spirit in their own consciences. You listen to us, but, alas! alas! the world and the world's maxims lay their hands upon the helm. The world controls you; the world guides you.

You come here, and you listen to these solemn warnings, and I will not say that you laugh at them, I will not say that you scoff at them—but is it not deeply in the heart of some young men and women gathered here to-day?—"Ah! well, we shall see, we shall see; but my bottom opinion is that preachers, as a rule, are far too gloomy; preachers, as a rule, rather look at the dull side of things. They have no sympathy with the joyousness and the aspirations and the warm-blooded enthusiasms of four or five-and-twenty, or younger." My dear friend, there never was a greater mistake. We have every sympathy with them, and I am as young as four-and-twenty can be in my own thoughts and feelings this day. I feel as if I grew younger every day. I was lately speaking to an elderly man who said he was disappointed to think that the very youngest generation should suppose that he had grown out of it. We are in full sympathy with all enthusiasm that is legitimate, that is not mere wind and effervescence; but some of us have tried to

take in the teaching of God's Word ; we have tried not to be misled by the seeming of things. We are listening with keener ears than you, and, although things seem to be bright and fair, and the wind sits in the shoulder of the sail, and everything seem to say, "Let out ; let go ; give rein ;" we can hear the eerie sough of a wind of coming judgment, the moaning of a coming storm. That ripple and sparkle which seem to be upon the waves just now will not be long there. There is a great, deep ground-swell coming rolling in from the outside, and soon—sooner or later for every soul that lives—there will be blackness, and darkness, and the reeling, staggering tempest. Life means stress, struggle, conflict, for which no soul is sufficient, and out of which no human soul unhelped shall possibly be able to save itself. That is what we are in for, every one of us. To whom are we to give heed ? The centurion and the shipmaster got the helm in their hands, and the day came when they were sorry for it. "Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul."

The thirteenth verse : "And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive." "Supposing that they had gained their purpose they loosed from Crete." Surely this parable, as I have said, ceases to be parable, or becomes parable very thinly veiled. There is an air of verisimilitude about it which is too strong for parable ; this, again, comes to be life—your life and mine. I am speaking to some this morning who are precisely in this thirteenth



verse. The south wind is blowing, and you think that you have gained your purpose. Oh, you are going to live to prove that all the preachers were, more or less, howling dervishes. You are not being guided by us. You are not taking the Word of God for the man of your counsel and the guide of your life. You are not crucifying the flesh, and its affections, and its lusts. You are sailing with a free sheet :

“ A wet sheet and a flowing sea,  
And a wind that follows fast,  
And fills the white and rustling sail,  
And bends the gallant mast ; ”

thus on you go. It seems as though just about the greatest fools going are these preachers about “ sin, and righteousness, and judgment to come.” You feel inclined to say, “ Why don’t you stop? You are speaking utterly against the whole drift and current of my experiences and my most deeply cherished maxims. Although I have not obeyed your teachings hitherto, I cannot say that I have suffered. Who is getting on better than myself? ” “ When the south wind blew softly, they supposed that they had gained their purpose.” So with some of us. The Lord help you, young men. The Lord help you, middle-aged men—for I could go farther down in the sliding-scale of years when I am seeking to expound the parable of these verses. You are not just so young now, and you are thinking that you have succeeded, when the fact is that your dangers were never greater than now, and only a short way ahead there is a storm coming upon you. I would rather that you should be wakened by quiet means, but if God means to save you, and if nothing else will do it, He shall send upon you such storms and tempests—such winds shall shriek and

whistle through your rigging as shall at last waken up even you to say, "I was the fool, and the preacher was the wise man."

Not long after there arose a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon ; and the ship was caught, and they had to let her drive, and they began to fear quicksands, and they undergirt the ship, and they were exceedingly tossed ; and next day they lightened the ship, they cast the wheat into the sea, and they cast out the tackling of the ship with their own hands. Is not that just like the voyage of life ? The winds begin to blow, the sea begins to heave, all is against us, and we find that we are far from where we started, and there is no putting back now. You cannot get back to early manhood. You cannot get back to opening womanhood. You made your choice. The south wind blew ; you thought that you had gained your purpose. You would marry that man, so you married him. You would marry that young woman, so you married her. You would sink your money in that investment, so you did it. You thought that you had gained your purpose ; and those voices that said " No " seemed to be ugly frogs in their dismal croaking. But to-day you are giving me more of your ear, some of you, more than ever you gave to a preacher on God's earth before. I have more of your heart in ten minutes than any man before ever had in fifty, no matter how eloquent he was. And I have no eloquence to bring to bear upon you, and my thinking is of the very barest and baldest. But you listen to me with your whole heart, *for the storm is on you to-day*, and that makes all the difference. " Your crazy bark is whirling like a nutshell in the sea." It is not that I am more eloquent and forcible than other preachers whom you have heard, but you are in better condition for

hearing ; and I say again, that *that* makes all the difference. In the poorest sermon that you ever heard in your earlier days there was enough to put you right for all eternity, if you had only obeyed instead of controverting and criticizing. But now, through the infinite mercy of God, you are listening. Your voyage might have been other ways and otherwise, but you would have your own way, and now read your sin in your punishment. But all through it—thank God for this—that still you are in the land of the living ; still you are upon praying ground ; still Paul's voice, the voice of heavenly wisdom and heavenly hope, sounds in your ears.

“ And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away. But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.” “ *Not to have gained this harm and loss.*” My friend, you have gained ; you have gained in your two hands what is blistering them : you have gained what you would gladly fling away, but—God help you—you cannot. You have got what you wanted, and now you would hurl it as far from you as the east is from the west, but you cannot. You have caught what you were pursuing, and it turns out to be a Tartar. You are in the grip and mastery now of that which you were going to secure and make your possession. It is possessing you ; it is shaking the heart out of you. Your face grows white with fear, sometimes, in the midnight hour when you think that what you have toiled for and lusted after will be the damnation of you, if you do not get rid of it. We do “ gain ” harm and loss. This is no

mere grammatical Greek construction. There is eternal truth behind it : we do gain harm and loss. But the point is, that in the midst of all the stress and tempest, Paul stands forward. I knew that Paul would have his innings again—if you will pardon that homely expression. You who were in the cricket-field all yesterday will understand it all the better. I knew that the tenth verse was not the last of Paul. Oh, no, here he is. Paul stands forth ; and how he is listened to now ! It may be that the laugh was against him in the tenth verse, but his voice is very cheering now. “ You should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.” That is the Gospel still. Please understand, gentlemen, that the Gospel is not a message that comes to you and says, “ Now, you are fine fellows, and you never did anybody any harm, and God loves you ; and all that you have to do is to just go on.” The Gospel comes, and it dares your wrath, and it looks level into your eyes and says, “ Young fellow, you are just as big a fool as there needs be.” It looks into your eyes, my pleasant girl, and says, “ Though outwardly you are fair and sensible looking, yet in your heart of hearts you are possessed with all manner of frivolity and dangerous ideas.” It does seem as if we should not speak to you that way. “ You should not have loosed from Crete, you should have hearkened unto me.” Paul comes back and harps on the old string, and dares to say to them, “ Now, although I am not a mariner, I was right, and you were wrong.” Do you see now where you stand ? He laughs best who laughs last. And where is the laugh now ? The Gospel has that nip and grip in it yet. The Gospel preacher is here—what to do ? Not to flatter men, but to contradict them, to cast down imaginations, and every high thought that exalteth itself against the knowledge of Christ, and to bring into captivity each thought to the obedience of Christ ; and it does nothing until it exercises that overmastering grip on the mind and heart of men.

*But, after that*, if you stop on your step, if you listen, if you humble yourself, if you admit that your wisdom is only foolishness, if you admit that the light that is in you is turned to darkness (and oh, how dense is that darkness!), the Gospel changes its tone. First of all it is solemn, it is warning, it is keen, it is cutting, and it is humbling; and then it says, "Now, do not despair; my voice was somewhat harsh, so was my speech towards you; but it was meant for good. I wanted to show you that I was in earnest, therefore I spoke of repentance, therefore I spoke of judgment, therefore I spoke of danger, therefore I spoke of hell everlasting. It was not because I loved to flout you, and to rub you the wrong way. It was because I know what is at the terminus of the road along which you are going—the sea across which you are sailing. Therefore I spoke so firmly, almost fiercely, as I did." But now that you listen, now that you humble yourself, what is the Gospel? It is really good news, it is glad tidings. As it was then, so it is this bright June day. The Gospel is June for gladness, June for bursting life and renewed vigour and energy. The Gospel may be likened to a man standing forth on the deck of a ship; the winds have raged round it all night, and the sea has dashed against it—the timbers are strained and leaking, the sails have been blown from the ropes, the masts are crashing and falling, death is most imminent in its most terrifying form—the Gospel is a man standing in the midst of the huddled wretches on that wind-swept and sea-swept deck, and saying, "Sirs, be of good cheer; there shall be no loss; not a hair of your head shall perish." "Be of good comfort, for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me. I exhort you to be of good cheer. There shall be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship."

I had almost said that we shall stop here and sing a hymn of praise. O men and women, travellers to eternity across this unquiet sea, let this Gospel music ring in your ears. Let it speak to your troubled hearts. "I exhort you



to be of good cheer." Thou shalt not be lost. Thy way need not terminate in the outer darkness. As the life-boat bears down upon the battered, almost engulfed wreck, so the Lord Jesus Christ bears down upon us as we are huddled on the deck of this ship this morning, and He speaks cheerfully to us—*when all earthly hope that we should be saved is taken away!* Especially does He direct Himself to those who are bitterly bemoaning and accusing themselves—to those in whose ears, while I am speaking, the reproachings and warnings of a despised mother, a despised father, a despised minister are sounding. It is enough to sink a man when he begins to realize that *sin is awful folly*, and that he has brought this imminent and eternal disaster upon himself, and that only himself is to blame.

Listen, then. Oh, this is the point at which the Gospel comes in. O men and women, do you understand the Gospel? If you understood your own situation, this would be like a gleam, a shaft of light in midnight darkness. It would be like heaven's music in the midst of the accusings of your own consciences. "I exhort you to be of good cheer." Yes, the Gospel is as literal and as free as that. It does tax us. It does tell us how foolish we were. It does tell us that we have brought this upon ourselves; but it says this openly and without reserve. If there has been a fault—shall I say?—in our Presbyterian preaching, especially as it has been displayed in Scotland, perhaps it has been that in order to keep ourselves square with all the creed we have been somewhat tempted to speak this text with faltering tongue, afraid to utter the infinite largess of the Gospel. May God forgive us. Let all preachers to-day, in the awful swirl of this maelstrom of London, stand in their places, and with full-throated utterance let out the infinite hope and peace of the Gospel. Fear not, O man. Thou hast destroyed thyself, but in God thy help is found to-day. Thou shalt not go down to the everlasting deeps. I exhort you to be of good comfort. Life and salvation are yours, if only now you will hear and believe.



“ Now is the accepted time ; now is the day of salvation.” Without limitation, without reservation, we preach full, free deliverance from sin’s power and sin’s doom. Good comfort, glad tidings of great joy to mariners almost gone. And Paul was believed, although it be not writ. You can read it between the lines. From that hour the central figure on board that boat is that little “ land-lubber,” as some of them might have said when the voyage began. He is the leading man. What a grand title he gives to himself. “ God, whose I am, and whom I serve.” I charge you from to-day and forward let it be branded across your brow ; let it be stamped upon your very eyeballs—this dignity, this title, “ God, whose I am, and whom I serve ; ” redeemed body, soul, and spirit, every limb and faculty within me. “ Whose I am, and whom I serve.” So it goes on and on.

I meant to notice, had there been time, the 38th verse, where, under Paul’s directions, after they had taken food, and are anchoring themselves in him, and anchoring themselves in the God who spoke such words of strong consolation through him, and by him, we read that “ they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.” Why, one could preach a whole sermon upon that. I could preach a special sermon from this text to young men, and to middle-aged men, and to old men. Here is a text specially for all of us—for all sorts and conditions of men, and for all seasons of life. One great lesson comes to all of us from this : “ They lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.” That was good wheat. To take that wheat from one port to another was the reason for this voyage. It was the *rationale*, the underlying explanation of this voyage. Paul and his companions were going as an extra. This was a trading vessel, carrying wheat from one port to another. But what an illustration of life’s changes and chances ! How one’s ideas and purposes are changed ! The hour came when these men, with their own hands,

took that good wheat and tossed it out into the sea. The hour came when they forgot that they were traders. They forgot their merchandise ; they forgot all about buying and selling, and getting gain, and this great thought was borne in upon their minds—how to save themselves. Salvation ! Life ! Their lives were in peril. And life was dear—so dear that the wheat was flung out into the sea. That hour comes to the souls of all men. That hour is upon every one of us. Hark, young men and women. In plain speech and without parable, let me say this : it becomes you and me to sail across the sea with as little on board as we can, riding as lightly as we can, for there is a big sea on, and many is the craft that is swamped because she is too heavy. Fling away even legitimate things. Go home to-day and sweep yonder liquor off the side-board. I am not going to say that there is sin in taking a glass of wine ; but I am going to say this : in the awful peril that we are in, with this awful tempest lying upon us, the great thought for every soul of us should be, “ Shall I get to the other side ? God helping me, shall I weather this storm ? And this glass of wine, this seemingly innocent thing, I had better part with it. My barque will ride all the more freely if I am rid of it.” Supposing that it were perfectly legitimate, here is where the preacher stands : Can you do without it ? *Then do without it.* Cut off your right hand, pluck out your right eye, if these things are imperilling your life, for life is more than meat and raiment. Life is the thing to be conserved, and he that loves his life, and pampers it and surrounds it, shall lose it ; and he that hateth his life, shall find it unto life eternal. Fling away, and you will get ; grasp, and you will lose. They cast the wheat into the sea. They did anything and everything to reach the shore and get out of this awful danger. So with many things. So with many of our companions, as well as with drink. So with theatres, so with many of our recreations, so with many of the books that we read.

The hour is too solemn for controversy. But here is the word, and there is the awful fact round about us. Men and women whom we know are going down in these dark tides of worldliness and sin, and you and I know what has swamped them ; they carried too much deck hamper, they were sailing with too much. Therefore they had not enough free board. Therefore, when storms came, they either sank or got utterly water-logged.

Last of all they got to land. "The rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass that they escaped all safe to land." They fell into a place, says the 41st verse, where two seas met, and the forepart stuck fast. I have seen the very thing. So have you. "And the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves." That poor boat just had its back broken. You can sympathize with her, as though she were a living thing, as you hear the creaking and the splintering and the snapping of her timbers, and the bursting noise as the imprisoned air was let out, and the shrieking of the men as they tumbled themselves overboard. "They escaped, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship." They escaped, barely, but all safe, to land.

My hearer, young or old, rich or poor, that hour comes for you and for me—the hour when we shall be in the place where the two seas meet. The death-bed is that place. The great surging tides of time and the great surging tides of eternity meet at that one spot, the dying hour. When these great waves take you and toss you, and all your power and skill and wit are gone ; when your boat, that is so stout now, is breaking up timber by timber, faculty by faculty, power by power, in the place where the two seas meet ; when you are being tossed, and champed, and pounded, seemingly into nothing—in that awful hour, what is your help ? Think of that hour. That hour comes—are you prepared for it ? are you provided for it ? In that solemn hour the true life within me may be saved from the broken

body, as these living men were saved from the breaking-up ship. We may be saved by one thing, by the rich grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, received to-day if never before. Oh, sitting calmly in this land-locked bay, soon to be pushed out to the swelling seas which wait for us outside, and on which we must embark ; before you go out take not simply my teaching into your heart, but take into your deepest soul the sanctifying faith and fear of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." And God will give you, as He gave Paul, all them that sail in the same boat with you. "Thou shalt be saved and thy house." Believe it. Salvation is on one side of it, scrimp and bare and "almost," but on the other side it is sure and certain and "altogether." "They escaped all safe to land." Heaven shall be ours. The larger life, the fuller freedom, the endless possessions and riches that are there, are ours, if only here and now we trust the Lord Jesus Christ. Dear men and women, let us be warned ; let us be warned in time. To-day there is hope, to-day there is room and time to turn. The hour after this may be too late. Now, while I speak, let us make sure of it, that we are not disobedient to the heavenly vision—that we take into our heart and into our life the Lord Jesus Christ.

O God, make this an hour of decision for Christ and for eternity ! Amen.



# Regent Square Pulpit.

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GIDEON'S THREE HUNDRED.

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## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE CHURCH,

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

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“By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place.”—JUDGES vii. 7.

A STRIKING story. Especially might it be a useful story for all preachers to-day, who find themselves in some little tide of popularity. It is a sifting story; it is a winnowing story. The Master comes in among us to-night, and His fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor; for the Lord, according to this narrative, and certainly as we find in the record of His earthly experiences when He was here in the flesh, really cares nothing for numbers. It is nothing to our Lord and Master to count heads if He does not count hearts and minds and wills along with the heads. All that is vividly illustrated in this narrative. Therefore I have read it; and, taking the text that I have quoted as the hinge round which it turns, we shall look at it a little more closely to see this and various other points of doctrine and experience practically illustrated.

Gideon had blown the trumpet at God's command, had raised the standard, and there flocked to his side, as you remember, some thirty-two thousand men. I can well imagine that Gideon's heart was lifted up, and he was in a state of high

confidence, if not strong exultation : for Israel, you remember, for a good while now, had been crushed under the oppression of Midian. They dared hardly meet together. This man, when he was called by the Lord to the work of delivering his people from this bitter bondage, was threshing his little quantity of grain in a secret place, because the terror of his country's enemies was so great upon him. The Lord spoke to him. The Lord took hold of him. He strengthened Gideon's heart. He set Gideon upon his feet in every way, and He made him to blow the trumpet; and, as I have said, and quicker perhaps than I am taking to tell it, thirty-two thousand men from defeated, subjugated Israel rallied round about him, just as if they had been weary for this day, and weary for that sound that called them to Gideon's standard. I see Gideon lifted up, not in himself, I believe, but lifted up in God, profoundly thankful, saying to himself, very likely, "Well, who would have thought it? I really thought that my countrymen were at such a low ebb that they never would have rallied. Why, what a difficulty the Lord God of Israel had with me ! He had to give me sign upon sign, and wonder upon wonder, before my own heart could be encouraged, and my own soul be made to believe that God at last had arisen for the sighing of the needy. And that thirty-two thousand of my countrymen should listen to the call, and should rally round the old flag of Israel, is to me a lesson which I trust I shall not forget, never to be as despondent and despairing again." Just then, when you can imagine Gideon in the midst of his exultation, the Lord came to him and virtually said, "Gideon, it is a grand company, but there is just one fault with it : it is too large. Gideon, the people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves,



and say, Mine own hand hath saved me." Ah! that is an old trick, and it is not done yet. "Now therefore," says the Lord, "proclaim in the ears of the host, and say, Whoever is full of fear, and afraid, let him return, and depart early from Mount Gilead." "And there returned of the people twenty-two thousand men"—in a twinkling that seemingly solid, compact host of men melted away. The thirty-two thousand became ten thousand in a very little while. The point is this. We need the same treatment yet. I said a little while ago in anticipation—let me come back upon it, and repeat it a little more firmly now—that the Lord cares nothing for heads if He does not count hearts. Especially in these days, when we are so fond of tabulating, so fond of reckoning up our figures on this side, and are so dismayed when some adverse critic counts up his totals on the other side. Now, after a story like this, which is so savage upon Church returns and Church statistics, you may do as you like; but I stand here to say that, after this story, I, for one, am neither going to be uplifted by the greatness of figures, nor depressed by their paucity. They may mean strength, they may mean no such thing. Let us put our dependence on the Lord God Almighty. Let us beware of numbering the people. It has never been very successfully done. There is a danger attaching to it. The year has just closed in your church, and you show me the totals of this year as compared with last year. So many members last year: one hundred more this year. So much money last year: £100 more this year. So many Sabbath-school teachers last year: a considerable increase this year. Now, look here. After such a story as this, take figures away. I do not want to see them. They may encourage me falsely. Again, I say, I am neither going to be lifted up, nor going to be cast down. Figures may be

useful. They have their place, I do believe ; but they need to be very carefully handled, and very carefully watched. It is a sore story this on Church statistics, especially when the numbers swell, and we are apt to indulge in a great chorus of praise because of numerical success. Thirty-two thousand men were just about to go forth to battle, and the Lord virtually said, "Gideon, Gideon, the Midianites will go through that band of yours like the evening wolves through a flock of sheep." And the Lord began a process somewhat severe : I will say more than severe. There is a savageness in that story. I will not reduce it to a word less than that. May we all feel it ! How the Lord Almighty had to reduce thirty-two thousand stalwart men to three hundred *in order to bring the band up to its effective strength !* The Captain of our salvation has strange ways with Him, has He not ? Sometimes past finding out.

Now, these men utterly deceived Gideon, and we have to learn that lesson—that we may utterly deceive each other. *Are our hearts right*, my brothers, especially those of us who ate bread and drank wine and consecrated ourselves to-day in these pews as part of the sacramental host of God's elect ? When you came into contact with Him at His own Table, did He really get you, body, soul, spirit, heart strength, mind ? Yes or no ? When we count you upon our totals, does the Lord also count one, or are you to Him a mere fraction—a nothing ? At present, for present conflicts, for present purposes, you are simply not in it. You sit there, as Gideon's army stood yonder, seeming to be all right. How we sang that hymn :

"Arabia's desert ranger  
To Him shall bow the knee."

How we sing all our hymns ! What a splendid roll there is

in them ! But the singer's heart may be the heart of a hare, after this story. Oh, if God's battles could be fought by singing hymns with fine words and swinging tunes, then His kingdom might come at any time. It might have come to-night, while we were singing that hymn. And I do not despise hymn-singing. I have told you already to-day how good singing tells, and how bad singing tells ; but the grand thing that we have to notice is, that the Lord looks not upon the outward appearance, but upon the heart. How stand our hearts as regards Him, and the word that He has said, and the eternal war that He is waging from generation to generation against all the enemies of truth and righteousness in the land and in the hearts of men ? ✓

The Lord said, virtually, "Gideon, give these people a chance to go home, and see what you shall see. Say to those that are timid and of a fearful heart, Go back." And twenty-two thousand showed the breadth of their backs, executing strategical movements upon home ! Twenty-two thousand ! I say, it is a withering story, especially in these days of counting and of statistics. How many of us would have stood, or how many of us would have gone ? Ah ! I think I see these men going home. Oh, how glad they were when that sound came to them, "Those that are full of fear about this campaign, go home. Go home and rest yourselves until your beards are grown, and until your courage has risen a bit." And they took Gideon at his word. It is said, "Discretion is the better part of valour," and "He that fights and runs away, may live to fight another day." So they went home. The Lord was not wrong. The Lord was right, for, ah ! He sees into the cowardly heart behind the soldier's clothes, and the soldier's singing and cheering. Nothing could put Him

off—and what the Lord wants is men, with the weight of men, and the courage of men, and the holy determination of men. Nothing less than that. So twenty-two thousand arose early. Said God, “Go home soon. Take yourselves hence as quickly as you can.” I think I see these men going home. I think I see their children springing out to meet their fathers, and wanting to be told all about the fight. I think I see the blush creep over those swarthy cheeks as these stalwart fathers had to admit the fight had not begun when they left. Again, I say, men and women, elders, deacons, Sunday-school teachers, preachers, tract distributors, it is a severe story. His fan is in His hand to-night, and He is purging us. Are we going to be blown away as chaff, or can we stand it? Are we wheat after all? God grant that it may be so for His Name’s sake.

And even when there were not so many by twenty-two thousand with Gideon as at first, still they were not dense and compact enough for God’s purposes. For God wants His army to be not like a great, big, overgrown cabbage, that has run to blades, and has no heart in it, but He wants His army to be dense—not *extensive*, but *intensive*—sound at the heart, solid as a cannon-ball. The Lord therefore said to Gideon, “The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee.” He brought the people to the water, and you remember the test. Those who stooped down to drink, and lapped the water with their hand and tongue as a dog laps, went by themselves; and those who, as Scripture says, bowed down to drink water, *were allowed to drink their fill and go home refreshed*, to wait for the next fight; they were not fit for this one.

Notice, then, when we come to this second action of God's testing of these people, how difficult it is to detect (shall I call it by the rude, blunt word) hypocrisy. Mark you, these other thousands *ought to have gone off with the first batch*; they ought to have gone at the first telling. But such an ingrained thing is formalism and hypocrisy, so determined are religious people to give the lie to God Almighty and to argue Him down, that these people stood firm when they ought to have gone. There ought to have been no second sifting process needed. One was enough to lay bare the hearts of men to themselves if they had been simple and honest and sincere. I think more of the first twenty-two thousand than I think of these. I do not think that these were braver men who really meant to fight. I think that they were men who wanted to make a show that they were *not* full of fear, when they had no more heart for fight than those who had just left. If they had stayed, they would have been the ruin, and not the success, of Gideon's venture, and of God's venture through Gideon. There is always a considerable number of camp-followers who can hardly tell why they are in the church. You really cannot—but note this—that the nearer you come to the actual pith and stress and strain of real work for God, then they disappear. You go with them, so to speak, up to striking distance, and just then they will break your heart by showing that they never meant to strike. They will come here on Sunday—they will sit in these pews and eat bread and drink wine—God help them—till their very souls are beginning to get drunk with religious formalism. When you start a week of meetings, and meet night after night, night after night, where a real bit of work is going on, they are conspicuous by their absence right round the week, and then they turn up again,

smug and smiling, at the canonical hour on the Sabbath Day. I mean that shot to go straight to the very souls of some. What is your profession worth to the Lord Jesus Christ here in Regent Square? No more worth than that parading and massing and marching was worth to God and Gideon centuries ago—worth as much, but no more. Do not let anybody be unnecessarily wounded if you have a good excuse. I am taking in all the excuses. I am shutting out and shutting in all things that need to be shut out and shut in; but I know that there are still those for whom the only kindness is to speak straight, as God and Gideon and the circumstances of the time spoke to those would-be soldiers. I use that kindness, and thus I speak. They were the weakness, and not the strength, of that campaign; and well was it for Gideon that they were sent back.

You have the same thing to-day, precisely—people who come with you up to the point of real work, and then “Presto! Pass!” they are gone. Great talkers, it may be, and considerable walkers. They will walk a good bit; but as to being workers, you never saw them yet bend their backs. They are absent then. Sunday-school teaching is a real bit of God’s fight against Midian to-day, but they never touch it with their little finger. And so with other kinds of service. In God’s great name, let me ask what are you doing but coming to Regent Square once a week? Now, I wish to say that your seat could be better occupied if that is all that is to come out of you. Is that perfectly, clearly understood? I wish that I could make it plain. If you will give me any language that will make it plainer, I will use it, for I do not speak in my own name. I am thankful that I do not know a single soul here to whom this applies; but I am speaking for God, and may God



wing the shaft into those who need it. It may be that I need it myself. If so, let it come home. I stand as widely open as I wish us all to be. The Lord wants reality. The Lord wants sincerity; alas! then, that He has to say, half kindly and half bitterly, "Go home, and depart to your own place; for the place of conflict is not for you." These unreadies—they remind me greatly of the description of the cowardly soldier by our own countryman:

"His gun's a burden on his shouther; (shoulder)  
 He downa bide (daren't stand) the stink o' pouther; (powder)  
 His bauldest thocht's a hankering swither  
 'Tae staun or rin;  
 Till crack! a shot! he's aff, a' throughither,  
 'Tae save his skin!"

Do not smile, when I affirm that some of us men and women are sitting for our portraits, and they are faithfully sketched. In this business there is neither male nor female. Do not find fault with the portrait. Thou art the man. Thou art the woman. Do not turn round and kick the mirror, and smash it for being so faithful. Say something sharp to yourself, and save me the trouble. Preach this sermon in such a way to yourself that it is bound to tell at least upon one person whom you know.

What was the test which God applied to them in this sore business? When you see these thousands upon thousands wasting away, and a solid three hundred left, what was it that finished this "Rogues' March" home again? What was the test; what was underlying it? Well, I think that it was just this. I am not going to say that these three hundred men were braver, bolder, grander men than those who had gone away. I am not going to say that these men were men of blood and iron—that they were Ironsides, who did not know what fear meant, that

they had no fear, no tremors, no doubts, and no misgivings. No, I do not think that. I think that they were men who felt their hearts beat beneath their jerkins like any others. They had very likely the same doubts and the same misgivings as to the success of this revolt against Midian as the thousands had who had gone home; *only they did not yield to them*. They encouraged themselves in God; they encouraged themselves in Gideon. In all their weakness and helplessness, they leaned all the harder upon Him who had called them to this fight, in which were involved death or victory. And that is all that God wants yet. So far as I have looked through these wars of the Lord, and all God's dealings with His people, in either Old Testament or New, I never find that God asked any mortal man *to do more than trust in Him*. There is the Bible, and look it through and through, and find if ever God asked from the mind and heart and body of man more than this, "Trust in Me." "Go in this thy might." All that He wants is simple faith. That is victory for you. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Let us in the midst of all our quaking and shaking have a heart in us that turns with faith and hope, although it may be very tremblingly and faintly, to the God of Israel. These are the people whom He wants, and to such as these He says, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob. I have made of thee a sharp threshing instrument having teeth, and with thee I will thresh the mountain." "One man shall chase a thousand; two shall put ten thousand to flight," because God is in these men, and these men are in God. It was men after such a pattern that constituted these three hundred.

"Of the three hundred grant but three  
To make a new Thermopylæ,"

Says the poet when referring to the famous Grecian contest. There may be any amount of shaking. God does not stand over us, and say, "Why are you shaking?" But His great angry outburst is, "How is it that you have no faith? Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"

Do you not see deep sincerity in the midst of this natural human fear and trembling? That bit of water to which they came would be a ford, an important place of military strategy in a campaign. These three hundred men were only flesh and blood, and this was a desperate business. Twenty-two thousand of their countrymen had gone away from fear; but when these three hundred came to the ford, it seemed that what was in their heart was not retreat, but fighting. Because when they came to that ford, a key position, an important place, *they cannot lie down and give themselves up* to the business of taking drink like the others. They are in a hurry. They want to get this stroke struck and done with. They are wearying now to be put past all fear and dubiety by getting at the foe. These others are glad for anything *that keeps back the striking hour*. Oh, they are thankful that there is a chance to drink—thankful for any kind of adjournment that staves off that terrible hour of hand-to-hand conflict, and so they laid themselves down, as the Scripture sarcastically says, "to drink water." This shows what was in their hearts. We see them, perhaps, choosing clean stones to prevent them from making themselves dirty. These are the nice kind of people who never should be far away from a drawing-room or a parlour. They are not of much use for roughing it. They are not of much use for campaigning. They are altogether rather feather-

bed soldiers, and ought not to come among the men who can "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ." They never go into the open-air, for example, to do a little work for God. These people do not go there. There is something very irregular about this open-air work to these exotics. They do not like to be bedded out. They are always in here, in the hot-house, if anywhere. They cannot stand the broad daylight reality. That would be too real and too sincere for some of us. It would lead us a little bit away from form and routine and conventionalism. Therefore that finds us out. I say there is nothing in the hottest word that I can say that is half so hot and fierce as the actual narrative that is here. Thirty-two thousand brought down to three hundred in order to get at its effective strength.

Oh, I can see those three hundred; they are thinking of fighting, and they cannot lie down, but they must be in such a position that they can keep their eyes roving round all the hills to see the first coming of the Midianites; for no doubt the news of the revolt has spread. It is known that they have revolted. It is known that the standard of Israel is set up, and that God has raised up a leader for His people, and they are thinking, "These Midianites in masses will be swooping down. Very likely they are making for this ford just as we are." They could not lie down and give themselves up to taking a drink. It was not drinking, but fighting that was in their heads and in their hearts; and they lapped as a dog lapped, so that they were free to see the oncoming of the host, and to spring to their places in an instant. Thus they drank, and God said, "These are the men."

This thing called faith in God, my friend, is a thing that

tells. It tinges, it tinctures, it colours every word you speak, and every thing you do. This God of ours so looks for faith in Him, that it actually comes to this, that you can take a drink of water so as to please Him, and you can take a drink of water so as to utterly offend Him; the point being the presence or the absence of faith and confidence in Him in your heart. The ploughing of one man, as he goes along there behind a team holding his plough by the stilts, may be, as truly as another man's preaching, a glorifying of God, and a bringing in of His kingdom, if that honest trudging ploughman has faith in God in his heart. The ploughing of another man is simply a sin on which God cannot look, because the man is an unbeliever. "Whatsoever ye do, whether in word or deed" even, says the Scripture, to the eating and the drinking, see to it that you put your heart into it, for the heart is what determines the moral character and worth of the man. The heart is the thing. And these men's hearts were right. With not a few tremblings and misgivings, their hearts beat true to God. The needle pointed to the pole star of their hope; and God accepted them.

Does not this come near to us now? Do not these old people, so to speak, pass away, and we to-night find ourselves in their place? How, my friend, does it stand with you in this time of discernment and separation? On which side is God putting you now?—*Now*. Is He finding as much faith in Him, and as much honest confidence, that His cause shall ultimately triumph in you and against your enemies, as well as regarding His whole cause, the whole breadth of the campaign over this terraqueous globe, as to enable Him to rank you among His true and faithful people? Or does He find in us so many doubts, so many

misgivings, so many reasonings and carnal questionings, that He has to put us aside, because He will get no glory from us, and He will have to fight the battle of this day and generation without us. God forbid. Let us be worthy of Him; and seeing that He Himself has come, that He Himself has put at our head no Gideon, even, but a greater and a grander than any Gideon that ever stepped, even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, let us be strong in Him and in the power of His might. Let us come to His banner, the blood-stained banner of the Cross. There is a more grand rallying shout than even that which woke up the glens: "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" A grander shout is the shout that we have, and a grander name is the name that is inscribed upon our banners—the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the shout of victory through the blood of His Cross. For our own sakes, in our battles against our own enemies, and for all the battle that is going on in our generation, do not let us shirk it. The enemy is in mass; the enemy is overwhelming. Defeat seems certain, and victory seems to be seated upon their banners; but as we look to our Leader, as we look into His strong, calm, clear, confident face, as we hear His encouraging tones, let our hearts within us be encouraged. He wants dead earnestness; He wants sincerity; He wants reality; but He does not expect perfection. He knows that He will never get that here; but let there be sincerity in the midst of all our faults and failings—the sincere desire that He may win, and also the sincere declaration that, God helping us, and by His grace, come one, come all, we will run all risks and take our stand with Christ against all the power of Midian in our day. That is what He wants, and nothing else than that will do.



You may be sure of it that, if in that day of danger God let those thousands go, and took the three hundred, much more will He act on the same principle to-day. How? I will tell you how. Hundreds of years after this occurrence, this same fight was still going on in the land of Israel, and it had come to this—that all the issue of the conflict was narrowed down to this point. All God's forces in the tremendous war against hell—hell upon earth—were represented by one Man, and that Man as weak, seemingly, as regards the flesh, as any man who ever called himself one of God's Israel. It was narrowed down to this: Jesus of Nazareth bore the brunt of the whole conflict on His own shoulders. "He trod the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with Him." A sifting and winnowing process had gone on, and He had not three hundred. In the beginning of His ministry He had thousands, but now He had not three hundred; He had not thirty; He had not three. "They all forsook Him and fled," and He was single-handed and alone. At any moment, if He had only lifted His pale, pinched face to His Father in heaven, and not so much as asked, but merely wished, God's angels, on wings of light and wheels of flame, would have thundered down the sky. He did not ask for them, but in our nature and flesh He fought, and fought, and won. And think you, my brother, that after that splendid victory He will take a shivering coward like you or me into His ranks simply to swell them and to enable Him to count heads? Nay, verily. You may be sure of it, that whatever is represented here of eternal principle in God's dealings with His people, is vividly at work in His operation in the professing Church to-day. What are we to do? What is left for us to do but to be ashamed, and to come back from our retreat, as I trust

these thousands did—as, in fact, they did. When the peal of war sounded, and the news of victory spread, their souls were erected once more in faith and confidence, and they came back. But, oh, what they missed

So with you and me. The Lord Jesus Christ to-night unfurls His banner. To-night the cry rings out, “Who is on the Lord’s side? Who?” I will call you neither saint, nor sinner, nor backslider. Those terms are somewhat technical and misleading. But who wants to-night simply to be done with sin, his own sin, and to begin the hand-to-hand, foot-to-foot, life-long fight against the power of Midian in himself, and in his generation? “Who is on the Lord’s side?” He will take you, if you come as those three hundred came. Let us come simply, sincerely, in simple faith and in fervent prayer, not trusting numbers, not trusting to anything worldly, or to any carnal weapons or forces, but trusting altogether to those spiritual forces which the world calls weak and foolish and inadequate. Let us come to Him. And if we do but as one man get knit together in His love and faith and fear, we shall do something for Him here; we shall gain the victory; and that verse in which Dr. Watts (I think) paraphrases this incident will be true. We shall see it in our day and generation; we shall be able to shout and to sing because of victory before our eyes:—

“For Thou our burden hast removed,  
And quelled the oppressor’s sway,  
Quick as the slaughtered squadrons fell,  
In Midian’s evil day.”

Not by might; not by power; but by My Spirit, saith the Lord. Amen.

# Regent Square Pulpit.

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THE CENTURION AND HIS SERVANT.

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## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE CHURCH,

BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

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TEXT—Luke vii. 1-10.

OUR Lord, as you are aware, marvelled twice—on this occasion and in another instance. This time He marvelled because of this great, and to Him glad, display of faith. Another time He marvelled, but the wonder was of a totally opposite kind. He marvelled because of widespread unbelief where His mighty works had been displayed, and where, at least, some faith might have been expected. Where our Lord wondered, let us open our eyes also. Let us look through this story to see wherein the marvellous is exhibited; and if we do this by the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, I think we shall see that, while perhaps the wonder culminates in the splendid faith of the centurion, or rather the argument in favour of his supplication, which he addressed to Jesus Christ, the whole man is wonderful. All through the story he looks well, and speaks well, and acts well. Everywhere he is admirable; everywhere he is worthy of being copied. From the very beginning, wonders break out in connection with this marvellous man.

“A centurion’s servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he

sent unto Him the elders of the Jews," with a request that He might heal his slave. Therein lies the first wonder, for this man was a Roman, not a Jew, and had not had the benefit of what we might call the humanizing influence of the Jews' religion. He was a citizen of old, proud, imperial, and imperious Rome—a man who felt that all the world was at his feet, and that all the world trembled somewhat at the nod of great Cæsar, in whose employ he was. He was a Roman, and a Roman centurion, and a man who had come through the usual troubles, the usual indurating processes of a soldier's life; for the soldier's life tends a little—does it not?—rather to thicken the skin than to make it soft and tender—rather to make one a little strong, and rude, and boisterous than to make one soft, and delicate, and considerate of others. That a Roman centurion should have loved his slave—for the verse says that his slave was dear unto him—is really a marvel. One day Cicero, the great orator and moralist, came into the Roman senate—I think it was to deliver one of his orations—and he publicly apologized to the audience because the death of a slave had told upon him a little. So far back was paganism, not only in the knowledge of God, but in the knowledge of the humanities, that Cicero, one of the moral teachers and leaders of his day, as well as a great orator, apologized because the death of a slave had troubled him. A slave in those days was simply a thing, a part of your goods and chattels. His life was in your hand, and very seldom was he held with any regard. And, usually, it is the case that when "man holds property in man," he looks upon that kind of property with feelings that are peculiarly cold, and selfish, and hard. More kindness will be shown to a favourite animal, or to a favourite plant, than to a slave.

I do not know that it is not worth while for us, even in these Christian days, and for this Christian congregation, to look with open eyes at this man. Although "service" and "slavery" are not now synonymous terms, is there not still too much of the old pagan feeling in regard to the bond that exists between master and man, between mistress and maid? Ah! we need even in Christian times to exhort people to come up to the level of this Roman centurion. The tide of humanity was high in him. The milk of human kindness was abundant in his breast; and it is to the shame of our common Christianity that it has not leavened with its warm and humanizing influences the relationship of master and man, and mistress and maid, to the extent to which it should have done. How often we hardly dignify a man in our employment with the name of man. We call him a "hand"—one of our hands—just to emphasize that we are only thinking of the bone, and brain, and muscle of the creature, and what we can get out of him for as little wages as possible. How often, when one of our "hands" falls ill, and is unfit for his work, he is cashiered—we let him go. That is not Christian. I know that men will stand up and say, "Preacher, take care, and do not interfere with things that do not belong to you." My dear friend, the whole circle of human interests belongs to me. I will not interfere further than my Master must have me to interfere. There are men, and women, and children at this very hour who are suffering because Christianity has not entered into the relationship between the mill-owner and the "hands" of his mill. The religion of Jesus Christ says that if a man who is in my employment turns ill, and is not fit for it, I am not therefore entitled to simply send him whatever money is due to him, and say that I have

filled his place. The religion of Jesus Christ tells me I shall meet that in the Judgment Day, and therefore I am to take care. Be diligent to know the condition of those who are in your employment, especially when they fall ill, when they are ready to die; and do not cast them off. It is unchristian; and long, long ago, one whom we should call a hardened pagan Roman soldier could not do it. He supplicated high Heaven itself to restore to him his slave, who was dear to him.

“He sent unto Him the elders of the Jews, beseeching Him that He would come and heal his slave.” “Man’s inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn.” Thank God, it is not altogether and everywhere prevailing, for, where Christ’s Gospel was not known, here was the centurion, and where Christ’s Gospel is known, we rejoice to believe that it is showing itself to be a great power, not only for bringing men back to God, but for restoring the lost brotherhood among men. But here again he was wonderful. He was such a wonderful man that the elders of the Jews—the elders of the nation that hated his nation, the elders of the nation on whose neck the heel of his was firmly planted—so liked him, and were so taken by him, and so convinced of his goodness, his large-heartedness, his amiability, that when he asked them to go to Jesus they went, although, perhaps, if any other body had asked them, they would have found out that they were not just quite sure that they should go, or that they believed in him to the extent that they could acknowledge him by going as a body of elders to Jesus with his request. But when the centurion asked them, he had so impressed himself upon them, that they went.

And I think that he must have been also a very magnani-



mous man. He had come, as many had come in those days, into contact with the simple and pure knowledge of God through Judaism. He had been to the synagogue, but a less large-hearted, and well-balanced, and open-eyed man would have stumbled there, because he would hear men in the synagogue praying for the very destruction of his nation, praying for the overthrow of himself and his imperial master ; and he would hear all the narrowness and bigotry, the exclusiveness, which were such marked features of the religion of the Jews at this time. And yet he had keenness of eye enough to take that which was good, and eschew what was harmful. He was far, far ahead of some fellows here, who consider themselves very sharp. He was far, far ahead of some sharp young fellow here, who would just do the opposite thing. This Roman centurion felt when he came into contact with the Jews' religion, " There is something here which the idolatry of Rome does not give me ; there is something here for my heart, there is something here that I can grip to, and rest upon, so far, at least. There are other things to stumble me, other things calculated to make me fling off from this narrowness, and intense hate, and bigotry which I see in the breasts of the Jews as regards everybody else. But I have got something here, and I will open my eyes to this light, and walk in the light, and expect that there is more to follow."

Now, you see the blessing that came to the centurion, because he was the well-balanced, large-hearted, open-eyed man that he was. He got a little light in the Jews' religion which brought to him the knowledge of the one God, the living God and the true ; and, as Bunyan would say, he kept that light in his eye, and it brought him to the great light, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and that along

the line of his human regard for his sick slave. Some are stumbled by the abuses of Christianity, because they are looking far too much at me, and far too much at others who profess the faith of Jesus Christ. Take your eyes off us and look more at Christ Himself—who He is, how He said things, what He did. It is pity that I have to argue thus, but in the present state of things we must. Take your eyes off us and look at Him, and keep looking at Him; and the more you do that, the more it will grow upon you, and you will say, “Although I have to put up with a great deal from those who profess it, there is something in Christianity; I will not fling it away because of the faults of its professors, but I will hold to it, and expect to know more and see more by-and-bye.” He was not an ordinary man. How many men do you know like him? Bless God day and night, and rise at midnight to praise Him, if you know one who is beginning to show some of the marked characteristics, Godward and manward, which this Roman centurion had, and especially if that one be yourself. Thank God that there is a mighty work going on in your soul, my friend, and give Him praise for it.

“They came to Jesus, and they besought Him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom He should do this: for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. And Jesus went with them.” This narrative is not going to teach us that salvation is by works. We know that salvation is not to him that runneth nor to him that worketh: it is of God that showeth mercy. Salvation is through faith, through grace, not at all by ourselves, not at all of our own meriting or of our achieving, but altogether through the blood, and righteousness, and perpetual intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ. As I said in

the morning, so I feel here again—oh, let us beware, lest this might be found in us—that we are using Christianity as a system that is here to save us the trouble of being good Samaritans—to save us the trouble of being humane, like the good centurion, whose story, so far, is another edition of the Good Samaritan, bound with another binding, and printed in Roman type. “They came.” It really does look, when one takes a broad view, as if we were totally misunderstanding what the Lord Jesus Christ’s grace is here for, as if we thought that somehow or another the Ten Commandments were removed, and that if we only believe, believe, believe, believe, believe, and keep up that parrot-cry, we are removed from the obligation to obey the law. Did Christ come to abolish the Ten Commandments? No; what Christ has done is simply this: He has, if I may so say, brought steam-power, wherewith to drive all the moral machinery of that splendid machine, the Ten Commandments. It was standing idle for want of power, and He came to drive it. He did not come to abolish the law. “Nay,” said He, “I am here to fulfil it, to set it working again.”

“He loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.” These facts were used as arguments to bring Christ to the man, and they told upon Christ. He perfectly understood it. He does not mean to say to you and me as He goes to this man, “Now, I give My grace to those who are worthy, to those who are humane, to those who are benevolent;” but He does say that it all helps, and we need ring that out. Suppose that you to-night should, under a generous impulse, come to me with a cheque for £50 or £500 to open some new beds in an hospital; or suppose you loved not our nation, but our

denomination, and built a Presbyterian Church somewhere in a place in which we could point out the need for it ; you might say, " Preacher, will that save me ? " No, it will not save you : but it all helps. Try it. Go out and try. I will not turn you away. It certainly means that if you are brought to that disposition (I will say this to you), you are not far from the kingdom of heaven. The Gospel will soon surely, in your case, have its final triumph, and land you at the foot of the Cross. You will find in Christ on the Cross something surely to draw you to Him. Seeing that you are capable of a little self-sacrifice yourself, you will not be long in coming to believe in Him.

Ah ! how this centurion's heart was just like a seed-bed which God in His providence had been preparing for the casting in of the good seed, out of which grows the tree of eternal life. Sometimes you may have heard us from this pulpit speak strong, hard things against morality, and we shall do it again when morality is used to keep us away from Christ's doing and Christ's dying, and only then. Good sound morality is too scarce for any man to despise it. My dear friends, go away and be considerably more moral than ever you have been. That is my advice to you, go away from this hour and be a better man, whether you are going to be a Christian or not. For heaven's sake, and London's sake, go and be a better man, a better father, a better husband, a better workman, a better clerk, a better sister, a better brother—go and be better. Morality, true morality, honest morality, sooner or later, as in the case of the centurion, lands at the Redeemer's feet. I will never say a word against being liberal to the Church, and kind to infirmaries. Go on, brother, God speed you ; you are in a good way. Only do not stop. ' Go on. The terrible thing

which the Gospel yet has not overcome is our inborn selfishness.

We might have expected in a centurion that when his slave was sick and ready to die he would have flung him out into an outhouse, and let him die, and put a lustier man in his place.

“Then Jesus went with them.” He is the same Saviour yet; He looks at every soul of us to-night just as we are, with all our tendencies and characteristics, good and bad; and all that we are asked is, that we will be natural, and open, and honest with Him, as He will be with us, for, says the poet,

“The love of God is broader than the measure of man’s mind,  
And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.”

Christ loved that man when He heard his story; His whole heart went out to meet him. He is the same Saviour still, He looks at us as we are.

“When He was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying unto Him, Lord, trouble not Thyself: for I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof: wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto Thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.” And then comes the argument at which most of all Christ marvelled, and so should we. “For I also,” said he, “am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers; and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard these things, He marvelled at him, and turned Him about, and said unto the people that followed Him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.”

The man’s humility is marvellous. He was unconscious

of it; but the Bible, the Spirit of God, would have us mark his humility. Ah! my hearers, if only just a little of what was so strong in that brave old Roman came into our hearts to-night in Christian London, what a vast and mighty revival of the grace of Christ Jesus would take place. All along these rows in the gallery, and all along the great expanse of this floor, what is it that is keeping Christ out of men's hearts, and keeping men back from Christ, if there are those among us who are not yet His, and He not yet theirs? I will tell you in one word what is at the root of it: it is the pride of Satan, and it will lead us to the same damnation if we do not get rid of it. The grand thing about this man, proud Roman though we might call him, was his humility: "I am not worthy," and he went down, and down, and down, in tone and speech; "I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof. Speak the word only"—toss a coin to this poor beggar out of your abundance, and it will be received most thankfully. Do not be deflected from your course to come to poor creatures like me and my slave—"speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." Oh, for the tongues of men and angels! Oh, for the power of God Himself, with one great swoop to bring from the pedestal of their pride, and their headiness, and high-mindedness, and damnable indifference, men and women here, and humble them at the blessed feet of the Son of God! No wonder that the man got his blessing as quickly as the Almighty Saviour could send it. I knew that—I was going to say—before I read it; I knew before I came to the end what would happen to that man—a man who stands "with bated breath and whispering humbleness" before Jesus, and says, "I am not worthy. Oh, I am so far off." You come to me, and pick



out two or three texts, and you have made a puzzle of them, and you say, "This text says so and so, and this text says something else; now explain all." I will explain all. Here is a text which you have not seen, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God. Submit yourselves unto God. He giveth grace to the lowly. He resisteth the proud." I am afraid that many of us have not seen these texts yet.

Christ comes in where there is humility. Along this humility, this flatness, this prostration of soul, as along a broad, sweeping avenue, the King of Glory rides in triumph into the human soul. Are we prostrate before Him? Has it come to this at last, that all our quibblings and all our questionings are silenced, and we are standing before the mighty Saviour—never mightier perhaps than when here He stood clothed in His meekness and in all His gracious condescension. Oh, has it come to this, that we have lain down before Him, and said, "I am not worthy"? "To this man will I look, to him that is humble and of a contrite heart, and who trembleth at My word." If you want a short road to heaven, that is the road—lie down. That is why some of us are so long coming at salvation—because it needs humility. My brother, let the man who loves your soul, as you do not love it yourself, tell you the truth right to your face. It is because humility precedes salvation, that in the case of some of us salvation is so indefinitely postponed: the pride of hell is in some hearts before me now. May Christ Himself overcome it while we preach. Then notice the originality of his prayer. This was not a man who, when he wanted his sick slave healed, ran for his prayer-book. This was not a man who turned over to the Psalms, and borrowed two or three expressions from David

—shall I say? It is a pity, friends, when we are beholden to other people even for our religion. Borrow a coat, if you have not one yourself; borrow money, if you have not got it, and can get people to lend it to you; but have a little religion of your own. Try to have a word or two, as it were, out of your own heart and out of your own mouth to say to God. Do not shut yourself up in mere formal expressions—routine expressions—I had almost said, no matter how correct in psalm-books and prayer-books. I like to dwell upon the splendid originality of this man's prayer. He said, "I will dare to put things to this Christ in my own way," and he virtually said within himself, "Now, it seems to me that my very work, the things that I know best, the army, and all the gradations that are in the army, are just a parable and argument concerning that for which I am asking this Jesus. I am here, and I am not at the top of things. I am away down, a mere centurion, a captain over only a hundred men. And there are men above me, and above me, until you come to the great Emperor, mighty Cæsar himself. But even down here I have authority. There are men beneath me again, and I say to this man, Go, *and he rather goes!* I say to another man, Come, and he is at my feet like a dog, almost before I have done speaking. I say to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. How much more"—this is an argument from the less to the greater—"how much more then this man, who in the ways of time, travelling *incognito*, yet, to my spiritual vision, travelling in the greatness of His strength—how much more then can He, who, I believe, has all power, and at whose girdle dangle the keys of all office and of all authority, speak a word only and heal my servant." And when Christ heard these things, even the Saviour in His Divine and human nature

marvelled at it. It tells upon the Son of God. "I tell you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." Why did it make Christ so glad? Well, for this, for one reason. Remember who Christ was. Remember where He was. He was the Son of God. Behind that face was the wisdom of the Godhead. Within that arm slept the power of omnipotence. And yet He had humbled Himself; He had come down into this world, a man among men, to bear the jeer and scoff, the scorn, and the cheap, easy, flippant unbelief that He knew He would have to stand, when, being Divine, He humbled Himself to be a man among men, and take His chance. And it was this that told upon Him—was it not? Have not you yourself sometimes in the great whirl of this London, when you came up first—shall I say?—and your heart was desolate, with the desolateness which is never so keen and so full as when a stranger gets lonely among the myriad faces, the myriad eyes that flash past you, without a glance of recognition, in this great London. Suddenly one day, when you are going along, with its stream and its current, and feeling yourself so lonely in the midst of thousands, there falls upon your ear a voice—some broad Scotch, or (what to me is both unspellable and unpronounceable) Welsh—something of home, and fatherland, and motherland. At once your whole face lights up, and bells begin to ring in your soul, and you nearly fling your arms round that man's neck, because his tones and his words brought to you thoughts and visions of home. Well, Christ knows all that. Oh, men and women, what a lonely world this must have been to the holy Son of God! How desolate! No wonder that sometimes, even after a hard day's work, He refused, maybe, to stay with people, and climbed away up some lonely mountain side to

get as near home, and God, and holiness as possible, and as far out of the sin, and the strangeness, and the unfriendliness. And what happened to Him was just in far greater measure what I have tried to describe as happening to yourself in this strange, lonely, unfriendly world. When that centurion spoke those words of splendid faith, it was as if the angel Gabriel stood at His side. It was as if a door opened in heaven, and a burst of heaven's sunlight flooded Him, and a gust of heaven's matchless music filled His sad and lonely soul. He heard the language and tone of heaven. Not Gabriel at the throne could have paid a more splendid tribute to the essential Godhead and divinity of that Man of Nazareth than did the centurion of Rome. It was grand. And the Son of God could not keep back His glad surprise. "I tell you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

Have I not said to-night—let me repeat it again—that He is the same Saviour still? Oh, men and women, let us make Him glad to-night! Let us go on this centurion's feet. Remember what you know as an accomplished fact, which, as yet, the centurion did not know. Let us for once in a while, instead of quibbling, and murmuring, and fault-finding, *and barely believing anything* about the blessed Saviour from the cradle to the Cross and the glory, stand up to-night and recite in His ears what we do believe. Tell Him with your own heart; tell Him with your own tongue. Say it again and again, until the unbelief within shall be throttled, and muzzled, and choked with the emphasis of that faith. "Lord, I believe. I do believe; and when I grumbled, or complained, or seemed to say that I did not believe, it was not I. Forgive me; it was the devil in me." Say it to Him. He deserves it by this time—does He not?

We say that we are going to make heaven ring with our loud acclaim of praise to His name. Is it not time that we were practising down here, for the man who has not got this faith on earth will make a rather timber-tuned singer up yonder. He will not get into the choir, in fact. There are no cracked voices going to get in yonder. It is time we were beginning to stand up before Him, and say, "Lord, there Thou art, a baby in a cradle, and I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God. There Thou art, a man going about the roadsides of Nazareth, healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, and raising the dead; and I believe." Look at Him again, on the Cross, pinned by those dear hands and feet; and stand before Him, and say, "Lord, Thou art there, and I believe in Thee there. The world put Thee there, and said that Thou wast an impostor and the offscouring of all things. Lamb of God, I never believed in Thee so much, nor felt my heart so drawn to Thee as there." Make Him glad. Say, "Lord, I believe." His heart is thirsting yet for that cordial. See, every hour what He wants is faith. That is what drew Him to the centurion. That is what drew the centurion to Him. Deep called unto deep that day.

"And he was healed." So says the narrative. When they went they found his servant whole that had been sick. Christ spoke the word, and it was done. He is the same Saviour yet. Mother, try it this way. You have not a slave, not a servant, but a son, or a daughter, and that one is not beside you, but away in Africa, or in India, miles away from you. Could you rise to this simple, this sublime, this Christ-glorifying notion, that if you just sat there and said to Him with all your heart, "Lord, my son is away from me. Lord, my daughter is going down the giddy

dance of death. My children are sick with an awful sickness, a mortal sickness, that seems as if it would soon cut them off; and they are away from me, separated by weary leagues of land and sea: but, Lord, I believe. Speak Thou the word only, and my son, my daughter, shall yet be saved. I shall not ask to see. I shall be content to wait till the eternal morning. Speak the word only." I am authorized in Christ's name to say that as surely as you do this, according to your faith so it shall be done to you: and the eternal morning shall declare that, when you sat in that pew and believed on Christ to save your dying child, ten thousand miles away, He in mercy sent His word and healed him.

Dost thou believe? It comes back to that, for without faith Christ's arm does not, will not move. Only believe. For ourselves, for those whom we call friends, for those who are dear to us, let us come straight into the light of Christ's blessed, homely, heavenly face, and say, "Lord, I believe. I can trust Thee for anything. I believe that Thou canst do anything." And He will answer and say, "Yes, and your faith, even in its highest soarings, is not fantastic, is not exaggerated, is not anything of rhapsody. All things are possible to him that believeth."





# Regent Square Pulpit.

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THE CALLING OF MATTHEW.

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## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE CHURCH,

ON SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 21st, 1890, BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

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“And Jesus went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi (Matthieu), sitting at the receipt of custom: and He said unto him, Follow Me.”—LUKE v. 27.

BEFORE beginning to preach, my dear friends, let me say how thankful I am once more to be back among you. I thank you, and God over you, for the rest and invigoration of body and soul which I have received in the vacation kindly given me. Whatever Regent Square may be, or may not be, you have most enlightened views about a minister's holiday. I wish that all my brethren were as well circumstanced as I am in that particular. I feel, however, that I cannot to-day requite you for your kindness by preaching as I should like; and you naturally expect when a man is rustivating he is apt to be also a little rusty, and I feel I have a little lost the set of the tools. I puzzled myself a great deal as to where I should get an opening made in the old Book for the resuming of my ministry among you; and I thought, “Well, there is always one door standing open, namely, that of giving the Gospel call.” I have taken this subject because it sets me upon calling somebody to Christ Jesus. The saints may not be greatly edified; but they can “take

it out" in prayer while I preach, and find refreshment there. Pray that some soul among us may receive the gracious call this morning, and that the resumption of my ministry may thus have the Lord's seal set upon it in the most blessed of all ways.

Now to our subject: The call of Matthew (Levi). "And after these things Jesus went forth." Here is what we have in our Shorter Catechism on "Effectual Calling":—"What is Effectual Calling?" "Effectual Calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the Gospel." When you were lads and lasses, you remember, perhaps, how you shed not a few tears over getting up all that long answer. Now, here is "Effectual Calling," not in Biblical definition, but illustrated for us in actual life; in vivid, moving, dramatic form. All that is wrapped in that accurate, Biblical definition of Effectual Calling is here, in germ, at any rate, experienced in the case of Levi. "After these things Jesus went forth." He was always going. No wonder He said to His disciples, "Go ye," for when He was here He was always "on the go" Himself. He was not a recluse; He was not a man who shut Himself in, and looked at the world through His study windows, or buried His head among books; He was ever out and about. Now He was at the lake shore, and now in the synagogue; now in the street, and again in somebody's house; but He was always on the move.

When He had been doing great things, He did not pause over them, as we are so apt to do when we have well done even a little. He did them, and when all people's eyes

were opened, and their hearts profoundly moved, on He went to something else. "After these things He went forth." What things? Things of such a nature that, as you see in the 26th verse, "They were all amazed and filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to-day." He might have paused a bit, and rested, and said, "Here is a great impression made; let this be sufficient for the day." But no. "After these things He went forth." 'Tis a suggestive phrase. His "goings forth" have been from of old, from everlasting. He had a great work to do, and how was He straitened until it should be accomplished! My fellow-worker for Christ, let me charge you, and try to charge my own laggard spirit to catch something of the Master's own patient continuance in well-doing. His eye was ever on the mark. He came to seek and to save that which was lost, and nothing could turn Him aside. Applause, flattery, the wondering multitudes, or desertion, unpopularity, ill-will—nothing could stop Him from carrying out every day, and all the day long, His gracious ministry of "calling them in." Down on the lake shore, calling fishermen to Himself; in the synagogue, saving souls there; in private houses; and here going into the street and picking up a "specimen" from the very toll-booth in which he was sitting, lifting taxes for the Roman power; going forth always right on to the end. When on the very Cross, with His hands and His feet nailed that He could no longer go forth—He was bound in affliction and iron—His heart went forth. Even in the hour of death the ruling passion was strong in Him, and His grace went forth and saved at the last moment the thief who hung beside Him.

"After these things He went forth." Let us also "forget the things which are behind"—everything in the

past that would entangle and ensnare us. Let us have the going foot, and the going hand, and the going tongue, and the "forward movement" in us generally. "He saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom." The Revised Version, I think, brings a little more optic nerve into it. "He *beheld* (observed) a publican, named Levi." What an eye for seeing sinners He had. What an eye He had to discern the publican. There were many, many good men in Israel, many, many God-fearing men, synagogue-goers, like ourselves, officers in God's house, who had a woefully blind eye for a publican. They would nearly have needed to tumble over him in the street before his existence broke upon them. The outsider, so to speak, of the whole human race was the publican.

Oh, that we might get over class and mass divisions and distinctions, and so get the love of Christ into our hearts, and tongues, and eyes, as to get rid of all things narrow, local, warping, and prejudicial! "I am a man," said the old Roman. "I am a Christian," say we, and therefore "nothing human is esteemed foreign to me." I am always on the hunt for men. My dominating thought is this: where can I get this Gospel of Christ Jesus to alight and do its work?

I do not mean to stand here and tell you minutely what an "alien" Matthew was, being a tax-gatherer; but rather let us proceed to make practical profit out of it. Is there no man or woman here who feels on the wrong side of the hedge, like Matthew? He was a Jew; his was a peculiarly Jewish name. As I am Scotch (and I am not going to boast of it, or despise it), or you are English (and you are quite as good a man as I am, I admit), or some others here are Welsh, from head to foot, as we are all, with our racial

individualities to our very finger-nails, *so was Matthew a Jew*. He was an Israelite, warp and woof. Yet he had got so far as this on the wrong side of the hedge. Back, back, back, he perhaps could trace his origin right to the sons of Levi, who himself was the son of old Jacob. He had got so out of it, he had gone so astray from hereditary leanings and caste feelings, that we find him earning his bread, making his money, by lifting the taxes for the hated Roman power.

You can sympathize a good deal with the hatred which the Jews had for the publicans, when you think of the political feelings of the time. There was a secret home-rule feeling working more or less in all patriotic breasts; and what nation was more intensely, more bigotedly patriotic than the Jews? Then think that, from among their own selves, their were men who could soil their fingers and their souls lifting taxes. Their very calling and presence perpetually reminded them of their lost nationality, and that they were under the conquering heel of the hated Roman. Whatever any Irishman may feel in hissing out the words "traitor," "turncoat," that was in a Jew's heart, and mouth, when he saw and spoke of men like Matthew.

And then think of it, that Christ was a loyal, patriotic Jew. His was as truly Jewish flesh and blood (without sin) as theirs. He was of David's line. And yet the strange, the confounding thing about Him, the thing they could not understand, was how He could not keep Himself "inside," among decent, respectable, presentable people. He openly let out His sympathies to those "turncoats," those "traitors," the tax-gatherers. He called Levi, saying, "Follow Me."

My friends, He is the same Saviour still, and I wish to emphasize it. Does anybody sit here who, while I am describing Matthew out and in, and his environment (to use an almost cant word of the day), begins to see his own likeness a little? There you sit, my hearer. I do not know why you have come in this morning. You did not mean to come, but somehow you are here—and Christ is here with you, and His eye is beholding you; His eyes are open, His heart-strings are thrumming. He will be over your way quicker than I can tell it, just because you are a renegade, and have kicked over the traces, and are so far “out of it.” Perhaps your father was a Presbyterian Elder. What are you? The very negation, the very opposite pole of all that your father was, and that you ought to be by heredity and up-bringing. Down town yonder, even bad fellows wonder at you, that *you* should be among them! “I do not wonder,” says a young companion, “I do not wonder I have gone wrong. I was kind of born wrong. My father was not religious, neither my mother, and all my training led me in the direction in which I have come. I am utterly profane, utterly irreligious; but that belongs to me. It is no wonder—considering the nest I was born in, the stable I came out of.” These companions look on you with a kind of horror, that you should have gone so astray.

You—you with the name Levi, you who *belong* almost to religion, you who should have been almost naturally a shining light—to find you away here in company with themselves is to them even something of a staggerer. But the grand thing is, as I have anticipated already, that Christ understands all that. When Christ turns to behold you, He sees all this in one twinkling of an eye—how the



devil has roped you in and tied you down; how the chances, humanly speaking, are altogether against your being made a soldier of Christ, and a follower of the Lamb. And while His eyes are kindling on you, His whole soul is girding itself to give you a Divine call, and a pull of gracious omnipotence behind the call, that will make short work of every cord that binds you—birth, blood, business surroundings, temperament, history, whatever it may be—and bring you by a round turn into quick, definite obedience to Himself and His Gospel. I think, my hearers, nothing is more magnificent than the reading with an understanding eye and heart of that tale of Matthew. There he sits, and Christ makes that toll-booth, that custom-house box, the theatre on which the leaders of two mighty powers contend for a human soul.

Christ beholds, observes, that man Matthew, as I have said. Oh, how He can see things that are not, as though they were! And Christ—may I say it with reverence—seems to be saying within Himself, “By-and-bye I will need a man to write My story. There is a good clerk sitting in there; it is a pity the devil should have all the fine clerks, all the fine penmen; it is a pity that the world and the devil should have a man like that in their employment when there are powers within him that can be set to far bigger and grander work.” When Christ looks at Matthew, He sees things that as yet are not, as though they were. “There is a man who will write the Gospel. There is a man who will write My story so as to convince his own countrymen. A man who has powers and faculties not merely for lifting taxes, and writing receipts, and feathering his own nest on the sly, while giving to the Roman treasury its due. But if I got hold of that man, I could untwist him,

and use him for a large, grand, and eternal work." And He did it. The devil pulls at one side, and Christ in His grace at the other.

The devil says, "Matthew, Matthew, see where you are ; see the money you are making ; see the preferment that is before you. You know," says the devil, "you know quite well, Matthew, that although you are a man of ill-fame in the community, because of your occupation, still you have brazened it out ; *and you are not an ordinary publican.* You are on the road to preferment ; you are a bright chap, a clever fellow, and you are going to give it all away on this momentary impulse. There is no money, there is nothing to satisfy your ambitions, along the way of the despised Nazarene." Yes ; the princes of the opposing powers—of Light and Darkness, Heaven and Hell, Grace and Sin, Time and Eternity met, and "bid" for Matthew's soul. Such a theatre is this Church to-day. God speed the right, and plead His own cause. You are sitting there, my young friend ; how do you know but that of all days in the week the effectual calling should come to-day ? It has come to-day. It is sounding in your ears now. Jesus—not I—Jesus, once again—only at my lips instead of His own incarnate mouth—says to thee, "Follow thou Me." "But, preacher," you say, "Do you know who I am ?" "Yes, I know who you are." "Have you calculated ?" "I have calculated about it to the last ounce and hair-breadth. It is thee to whom the Gospel addresses itself this morning. It is grand, more than I can bring out.

This challenge of the Gospel goes right down there into the City, right into the midst of the City, of which the god of this world says, "You, preachers may make some headway when you get the people out of the City and into

the Sunday and into the Church, and there begin to exercise your powers upon them. But when I get them down within sight of the Mansion House, by the time they have rattled down Cheapside on Monday morning—where is your Gospel? where is your Christ? where is your salvation? where are your things spiritual? They are all obliterated. “The City is mine.” “It is a lie!” says Christ. He called Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom, and took him out, and carried him off in triumph. I say again this is magnificent; this call of the Gospel going right clean smash into the thick of all the world’s ties and entanglement. It is going on to-day. God help us poor preachers all over London who to-day have got a chance. You are out of office, you have come from behind the counter: to-morrow you will be back there; but I trust to-day will make a difference. Matthew, look up! you are called! City man, you are called! Partner, you are called! Cashier, you are called. Don’t you hear? Called! Answer to the call. Business men, Christ walks into business, and calls men by His grace while sitting at the receipt of custom. He is instant in season, and out of season. Now, the 28th verse: “And Matthew left all, rose up, and followed Him.” My hearers, I have told you often from this pulpit unless God had spoken in this Book I had no message to men. My whole stock-in-trade is just to repeat what He has said. “This only is the witchcraft I have used.” Look at it. “And he left all, rose up, and followed Jesus.” If that entry has not been made in your spiritual biography and diary, your life has not been worth living up till now. I dare to repeat it, and look into your face. With all your abilities, your years, honours, successes, unless that red-letter entry can be put beside your name, your life is a

wretched failure up to now. "He left all, rose up, and followed Christ." Then he began to live; never till then. The life received meaning and purpose.

This is *the moment* of life. That man passed through the pangs of new birth somewhere, sitting in the box, with the last cash he had received not yet jingled into the till. Oh, what a "call" this is, that comes right in and makes no apologies, and does not even give you time to put your pen behind your ear, to talk about it. But just there it is; do or die; death or victory; Christ or the world; heaven or hell—right on the spot. And Matthew—it all rushed with his blood quicker than I can think it, or tell it, or any man can conceive—Christ's word rang through every corridor of his soul, and awakened up every power of his being. He has not forgotten yet, this Matthew, who rose up, and, as the Revised Version says, "forsook all, and followed Him." I think I see him there; one moment sitting quietly working away—keen, eager, business man; Christ looks in; catches his eye: "Follow Me!" And lo! Matthew has been doing nothing else ever since, until this hour. "The Gospel?" Why man, that is the Gospel. The leaving of all. "What do you say, preacher? Are you to have no consideration?" It is the best consideration for you, my brother, to have none. "Are you not going to take into consideration?" It is best and most merciful for you to seem to be harsh and imperious; to say to you, Down with all; hands off; let go; instant! Why, at this moment, my hearers, if I saw what Christ sees, what ruin or success depends upon your obedience to this Gospel call;—you think I am urgent now, you think I am eager; why, man, I am not one hundredth part of what I ought to be. If my eyes were open

as my Master's are, I would shut the Book, close this formal style of things, and grip some of you actually by the shoulders in the pew. Everything becomes sane and reasonable then; the wildest urgency, being instant in season and out of season, is just to be sane, and calm, and logical when you understand that the issues of this business of preaching the Gospel to-day are from eternity and to eternity! Therefore I ask no pardon; therefore, like my Master with Matthew, I make no apologies, I stand not with bated breath and whispering humbleness. Therefore I make no dalliance with objections, difficulties, misconceptions, and so forth. But because I love your soul, because I know your difficulties, and have been to the root, and below the root, by Divine wisdom, this is my word; this is the Divine method of dealing with some of you: "Rise, leave all, and give thyself to the living Redeemer here and now." And here it was done; he was called; he was effectually called. How are we to do it to-day? Our circumstances are similar and dissimilar; when you balance the whole business, similarities are greater than the dissimilarity. Oh, my hearer, yield; I will neither call you young nor old, rich nor poor, neither successful nor unsuccessful; I will neither speak of you as married nor single; I will neither speak of you as godless nor as decent; but just as man in God's sight, meeting with Christ to-day, it may be somewhat accidentally, somewhat by the way—but you are in for it. This meeting and parting, the effect of it will not be exhausted for weal or woe, through all eternity. Now, will you let go, as you sit and where you sit? Will you make Matthew's decision? Christ knew what was working in that man's heart.

We thought that that man sitting there was only a publican. But I like this in Christ. Are you sitting there, a seemingly godless fellow—utterly dark, and cold, and dead to spiritual things? I may misunderstand you, those who know you best may misunderstand you; but Christ does not misunderstand you. And now, in this acceptable time, He is giving you this call. That is to say, Jesus knows that there is more in you than the eyes of your fellow-men give you credit for. You sit down behind that mahogany desk, and seem to be as cold, and polished, and worldly as your surroundings are. But my Master knows that many a strange thought, even when jingling the cash, even when turning the ledger, you have had. He knows you are not the mere “clerk in an office” you seem to be. You have notions about higher things—even you. It seems as if the only thing you care for in literature, for example, is to get the evening paper, and see how the betting goes. But if I said that all that was in you was the thought of a good crib, where plenty of money could be made, whether ill or well, and how a bit of sport could be had, I should be wrong; and my Master and yours does not allow me to say it. There is Matthew, and most folks would say he was a renegade Jew, with all the finer patriotic susceptibilities trampled out of him by his mere greed for gain. Christ goes and stands there, and says, “Matthew, I know you better. Matthew, I know *this* that is in your breast. Matthew, when your eye wept in secret places because your life was running on the wrong rail altogether, and you were getting to feel it, I saw you then.” Fellow-men, might I not speak this of somebody here? You are not just the cold, hardened man of the



world you seem to be. You have had desires and movings of your heart after God at times. You would have been ashamed to mention them to your ungodly companions. You were amazed that they ever came upon you; and so am I. Man, may it not be because you come of a good stock. There is something in that. Matthew came of a godly stock. There is something in belonging to a praying father; there is something in coming of a godly ancestry. So there are thrummings, and throbbings, and tremblings of spiritual desire in the hearts of young fellows down there that we give no credit for. But Christ knows them—He works upon them, counts upon them, *speaks to them*. In an acceptable hour and calculated moment, He uses them to work His eternal purpose. Detaching a man for a moment, by their means, from his worldly surroundings, He isolates him, and shoots this spiritual power of the Gospel call into him. May it be so to-day! I cannot tell what is to be—I cannot tell how He will come with the word. All I have got to do is to call you; and all you have got to do is to obey. With God be the rest. But be sure that the eternal morning will discover to us that there was no jarring or dislocation; but that, contrariwise, our life began to take on order, and purpose, and blessedness when the Gospel came to us, seemingly without calculation, and asked us immediately to yield to its claims.

So “he left all, rose up, and followed Him.” First the heart, and then the body. The “leaving all” was first a mental thing; the swift sweep of the eye round the office and forward into future preferments, &c.: that was mental, spiritual, moral, invisible, unseen. The rising up was physical. That was a small thing. The big item is, “He forsook all;” by the sudden movement of his soul, assisted

by Divine grace, he threw himself clear. Like your Davenport Brothers, roped and roped until it would seem that they would never get extricated ; but a sudden twist and jerk, and lo ! the ropes fall from off them, and they walk out clear. So with grace. Try it, man. Do not give in. Do not say, "It is too late, I am hemmed in and tied up." Give a wriggle, give a twist, and the devil's "green withes" will snap from thine arms as from Samson's, long ago. Greater is He that is for thee than all those things that can be against you. Walk out—Christ's redeemed, disenthralled, enfranchised freeman — walk out. Make up your mind ; then rise ; take the first step.

Our time is gone and our subject is not done. That is a common experience in Regent Square. The 29th verse, "And Levi made Him a great feast in his own house." This is how the Gospel keeps on. When Christ got Matthew, He got him altogether. Matthew had been a bold man before ; he had absolutely and openly broken with the religion of his fathers, with all national and ecclesiastical sentiments and feeling, and became a tax-gatherer. And now, when he becomes a Christian, was he going to sneak along through byways and alleys ? Not he. Matthew made him a great feast, and got all his publican friends, and all the riff-raff down town, to come in, so that Christ got a big introduction.

When Christ opened the door in Matthew's heart, He opened a far wider door than the eye of sense could see. Matthew was worth the calling. See what a world was behind him ! It led Christ into wonderful company. I do not dwell upon that. Here you have a man taking leave of the world joyously ; with a true merriment and heartiness he held this "carnival," this farewell to the world and the flesh. Here is your Salvation Army man snapping his fingers

and shouting "Hallelujah!" I never find fault with men for that. A Hallelujah is justified any day in the week and in any place under the sun if it comes from the heart. It is justifiable and always in order to say, "Hallelujah! 'Tis a fine thing to be saved." That is Matthew. He made Him a great feast.

We come to some of you and ask you, "Have you come to Christ?" And you pull a long face, and the light goes out of your eye, and your very being almost collapses, as if it were a dreadful business. Oh, it is a good thing, if it is true. If you had gone to Matthew and said, "What is this I hear—have you given up the tax business?" he would have said, "Hallelujah! I *have* done with it. Man, come in to-night and have a bit of supper; Jesus is coming. Won't you come and see Him?"

Ah! where are these converts to-day? I wonder whether I am one myself. "Levi made Him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and others that sat down with Him." God speed the Gospel on the old lines. First of all, sitting here to-day, let all of us bid good-bye to the world, the devil, the flesh, and then don't go about hanging your head as if you had done something dreadful. True religion means joy; true religion means not giving up; true religion means entering into great possession. Matthew would have told you, if you had met him afterwards, he would have said, "It was the grandest thing that ever I did; and the more I thought over it, the less became the difficulties and the greater became the pleasures. When I held that feast in my own house, it was just because my heart was dancing, because it was so big and full, and I could not contain, and I felt I must do something extraordinary to commemorate my new

departure." Oh, my Christian brothers and sisters, let us go home and make Christ a feast in our own houses because we are saved. Let us introduce Christ at our own table, to our set and connection. When you get them in, round about your table, testify for your Jesus. There make it plain and apparent that you have followed the Master, and that this house, and this table, and all that is on it, and round about it, have changed owners—not my own, but Christ's. Rejoice with me!

"Write the day of your conversion,  
Festive in your coming years."

And why? "For whom Christ calls, them He also justifies; and whom He justifies, them He also sanctifies; and whom He sanctifies, them He also glorifies." This "publican" is in heaven. It is all on the right side. The balance is all our way. Therefore let us rejoice; yea, again I say, let us rejoice. Christ hath set us free. Free to serve. We have not given up so much as we have received. "How blessed," might Matthew have said, if he had only known our Christian hymn—

"How blessed from the bonds of sin  
And earthly fetters free,  
In singleness of heart and aim,  
Thy servant, Lord, to be!

"The hardest toil to undertake  
With joy at Thy command,  
The meanest office to receive  
With meekness at Thy hand.

"How happily the working days  
In this dear service fly,  
How rapidly the closing hour,  
The time of rest draws nigh,

"When all the faithful gather home—  
A joyful company;  
And ever where the Master is,  
Shall His blessed servants be."

Amen.

# Regent Square Pulpit.

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THE DEAR-BOUGHT DRAUGHT.

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## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE CHURCH,

ON SABBATH MORNING, SEPTEMBER 28TH, 1890, BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

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TEXT.—2 Samuel xxiii., from verses 13 to 17.

I KNOW, Christian friends, that while I read this incident, so familiar to all of us, your heart, without preface or study, your spiritual fancy or imagination, feels "there is something there." We have an instinctive, indefinable, but very real feeling and notion in our minds that this is one of the places where David is a man after God's own heart; because a man after what is deepest and truest in our own heart as well; that here there is a mysterious mingling of the human and the Divine, the ordinary and the extraordinary. This subject well deserves study; here we shall very likely find that the Spirit of God is lifting up David before us that He may teach us something about that which is evidently looking up at us—something about Life, and Love, and Sacrifice. May the Spirit, indeed, bring

to us some fresh and present lessons out of this old, this familiar, theme, and these Divine and human ideas.

I do not think that this was what you might call a mere sentimental longing. David was strong in true and real sentiment; but I do not think that when we have him pictured here longing and sighing—"Oh, that I could get a drink of the spring-well before the gate at Bethlehem!"—that he was, as some have supposed, merely suffering from passing home-sickness. (Even that is bad enough.) Some take that view, and imagine that he just momentarily gave way to one of those whims or morbidities that come across the spirits of otherwise brave and earnest men, and make them as weakly sentimental as their neighbours.

I do not think the Spirit of God would have recorded this incident so minutely and graphically if David's soul had been moving along that lower plane. No; when I read that "*David longed*," and I hear his longing set forth, I like to think of him as showing here something of his deepest and best. The Spirit of God would make us know that He understands us when we are like David. There is a depth in us; a deep below, perhaps, what we ourselves, in our commonplaceness, were unaware of. The hard-beaten bottom or floor of our soul sometimes gives way. Many a time and oft, when we are not thinking, or ever we are aware, these common, ordinary, worldly hearts of ours are cleft as by a great chasm and depth, through which there comes, like



the breath of the mountain wind sighing through a gorge, a great, inexhaustible "Oh!" Like David, we long! "Oh for youth; oh for renewal; oh for freshness; oh to get rid of what is making me tame, and flat, and dull; of the earth, earthy; and of the world, worldly!" "Here I am," thought David, "in this hold; great things were promised me some time ago, that I was to be king, and was coming to a kingdom; and lo! I find myself tossed to and fro; and to-day, with my followers, compelled to bend to harvest work away out here in the wilderness!" Don't forget that foregoing word; "it was harvest time." This uncrowned king was very likely hot and faint after a day with the reaping hook;—it *is* hard work; especially for those who, like kings, do not often try it. But this king had, through pressure of the time, and the strange experience that this life brings to one and all—he had, as you might say, to sink down to the level of the shearer. And you cannot misunderstand him, surely, when you find him thus tired, and hot, and faint. A great many things were coming and going through his breast, when there burst out this "*Oh!*"—this gust of desire from the very depths of his spirit—"Oh that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!"

You see, there was a great deal in that water. There is no water like the water we drank at home, when we were young. This London water—ugh! why, when we went

back, during our holiday, and drank again of yon sparkling spring that rises at the hill-foot behind our mother's house, we almost cried. Was that sentimental? Was that sickly? Is not that feeling derived from something deep and true within the soul? It is more than ordinary water. There are so many things in it, giving it taste and tone. While you drink it, you are thinking. When you drink of the spring in middle age from which you drank when a youth, there are tonic bitters in it, that have come since, as a free, open, ingenuous youth, or as a gleeful, sunny-haired maiden, you drank of that home well. What memory brings into mind of all the years that have come and gone between! All that is in David, and much more than that; yes, and my hearers, it is in your longing and sighing. City man, of whom I have often made an illustration, and, though it has been a bow drawn at a venture, it has pierced through your close-set mail,—your worldly city-soul, noisy with the jingle of cash, and the din and hurly-burly, has been suddenly cleft by a chasm, through which there has rushed that great swelling sigh—"Oh! I am losing myself! Oh to get back; oh for youth; oh to be renewed!" It is the longing of the human heart that we see coming out of David; consciously or unconsciously, expressed or unexpressed in words, the longing of the human soul in a weak, and spent, and depressed hour.

And this "water of the well" is the type, and symbol,

and picture of it—the rush of the spring, with the sheen and the bubble of the water. We are not so utterly dead, and dark, and given up as we seem to-day. God can open rivers in dry places. He can pierce down, down through all the mortification and all the corruption ; through all the sand and sawdust ; all that is earthly and carnal—down to the quick. Then up there comes that burdened sigh—“ Oh for living water ! oh for cooling streams ! ” Rightly used, it leads the longing soul back to more than original purity. The purity, the pristine innocence, and sweetness that were ours in Adam, are more than restored when we quench our thirst in Him, whose grace is to our soul the well that is before the gate of Heaven.

And this is also a type—is it not ?—of the cry of the backslider who once knew the joys of salvation ; who once lived in Bethlehem, the House of Bread ; and drank of the well that bubbles up from beneath its walls. Time was, in your early years of faith, hope, and love, when you drank of that river, “ the streams whereof make glad the city of God ; ” the stream of spiritual refreshing that springs out of the threshold of the temple ; yea, rather that has its rise beneath the throne of God ; that “ river of the water of life, clear as crystal, which proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb,” and which breaks out at some spot of earth, some gate of Bethlehem. But that is all gone ; you have forgotten yourself ; you seem to have lost your

road ; you have become cold and earthly. But God, out of His great mercy, in ways I cannot tell, but you know them, revives you, and sends across your soul a breath of spring. And you know a time of revival has come, not because of sweet feelings, but because of yearnings, keen pains, and pangs of desire, that wring out of you the cry, "Oh to be what I was in the days of the gladness of my heart, of my happy espousal to my blessed Redeemer, who was to me Bethlehem, my House of Bread, and also a perennial fountain of living water !" Well, poor sinner, natural man with your thirst never yet quenched ; or, poor backslider, yearning for the glory that has flown, and crying,

"Where is the blessedness I knew,  
When first I saw the Lord ?  
Where is the soul-refreshing view  
Of Jesus and His Word ?"

Oh for the auld Bible, and the auld kirk, and the auld minister—those wells of long ago ! God knows you sigh ; He hears your groan ; and there is a divinely appointed answer to that quenchless longing "Oh !" and He has given you this deep, this divinest aspiration in your soul for something outside, utterly outside of your present condition, possession, and prospect.

Ah, yes, we repeat it again, there is a great deal in a drink, in what it suggests. Oh may you get that suggestion and the satisfaction of it to-day. Although I am, as

you know, a teetotaler, I have never had the slightest difficulty in understanding Keats, who, when he listened to the nightingale, had wrought in him what the thought of the water at Bethlehem's gate wrought in the heart of poor distracted David. You remember how Keats sings; it may be a kind of sensuous longing with him, but all the same it illustrates this spiritual throb. He says, as he listens to the nightingale,

“O for a draught of vintage, that hath been  
Cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth,  
Tasting of Flora and the country-green,  
Dance and Provençal song, and sun-burnt mirth !  
O for a beaker full of the warm South,  
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,  
And purple-stained mouth ;  
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
And with thee fade away into the forest dim.”

And the deeper longing comes in—don't you remember ?  
—when he says,

“ Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget,  
What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
The weariness, the fever, and the fret,  
Here, where men sit, and hear each other groan.”

Far deeper is the longing that rushes through David's soul, as he thinks of brighter days and times ; and the same longing rushes through the sinner's soul this morning, and through the backslider's soul, as he also feels that breath, that “sough,” that wailing, fitful, sobbing tempest—

“Oh that I could get back to God, the living God!” Do not go easily over that word: *David longed!* Oh that God would give us to-day longing hearts, my brother, my sister, to find Him out. For you will never find out God by greater intellect; never by wider reading and deeper study. This is the road to God; this is the “new organ” by which we receive the truth that alone can satisfy. “As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.” May it be given us to-day *to taste*, and see that God is good. It would be the beginning of a blessed revival in the heart of every saint or sinner here.

“And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord.”

So David's desire was gratified. As I have said, this is evidently not David in a lower mood. The three mighty men did not misunderstand David. It seemed to be a little thing, but they heard David's whole soul in those gusts of desire. They interpreted that his life was being dried up from the roots. They were all mighty men, these. David was mighty in his weakness, and they were mighty in their loving strength. The three mighty men said, “He shall have it.” Shall I say one had wisdom, and the other love, and the other power; and these three together scattered



the powers of Philistia? Oh! don't you see how the Gospel breaks out upon us? You yearn for something the possession of which would be the renewing of your youth; the lack of which is decay; *and your longing is heard*, and your prayer answered before you know it. The Three Mighties, the Blessed and Glorious Three, Wisdom, Love, Might, have broken the host of the Philistines, and have brought to us—right to our parched lips—before our sighing is done, that bubbling spring for lack of which we die.

I knew the Gospel was there. I knew it when I read the story. I felt it more deeply the longer I studied it. Do not accuse me of dragging things in—of putting the Gospel where it is not. The grand key to open the Old Testament is Christ—put Him in wherever He will fit, and certainly He will fit here.

The Father's wisdom, the Son's love, and the Holy Ghost's invincible energy; Wisdom, Love, Might, these are the Three. Hear it, oh sighing, longing, yearning heart! Thy voiceless prayer is answered. God has not held His peace. At thy tears He has come to thee, bearing with Him this *Elixir Vitæ*, this water of life. The breaking through the host was a great sight to see. These three mighty men, moved by love—love for the sighing David—better than I can describe or they could explain, they went. Perhaps it needed time; perhaps it needed tact, skill, and patience, as well as terrific force;

but whatever it needed, these three had the sum total of all the faculties and powers required ; so they broke through the host of the Philistines and brought the water. And that is where I am to-day. Whatever these three mighty men felt, as they came back to David bearing the water in their hands, that this unworthy preacher feels to-day, standing before thy thirsty heart. Look up, oh fainting soul, it is here? I come to thee with living water. I come to thee with that which shall supply all thy need. Let your glazing eyes be opened ; let your dull ears be unstopped ; and your fainting souls, lying stretched and almost dying on the scorching sands of time, understand that the air is vocal with that heavenly sound, "Water! Water!" "Ho every one that thirsteth come"—come to the fountain ; drink, yea, drink, abundantly of the river of life that God hath provided in the Gospel. That is the Gospel. That is Jesus, in whom all the Trinity of wisdom, and love, and might is incarnate. Jesus standing right in our midst to-day, and lifting up His glad and eager voice as those three would lift up their voices to spent and stricken David—"In the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink." Now, you came in thirsty, hungry ; you came in with a depth in your soul ; you came wondering how it came to you at all ; and you are longing for something the world cannot give or take away. Be at peace, at rest.

“He that cometh to Me shall never hunger; he that believeth in Me shall never thirst.” This is the water of the well of Bethlehem, that is by the gate. Come, oh my hearer, oh my own soul, the water is here! The fainting is gone; the leanness and the sighing, these are over. Rejoice; and where you are, and as you are, begin with joy to draw water out of the wells of salvation. Only receive it; oh taste!

Still further, the story deepens in interest. “Nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord. And he said, Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink of it.” Again let me repeat, you must have the idea that this is David at his best for teaching. There is something wonderful here. It is not a mere sentimental longing. Here we have the very crown and flower of Gospel teaching. What ought this great love of God to produce in our hearts? What did this great love of these three mighty men produce in David’s heart? It begot in him a like spirit again. They flung themselves away for him; he flung himself, and them with him, back upon God, the Fount and Spring of all.

So with us: Christ has brought us pardon, and peace, and everlasting life. Let us learn from David in this Old Testament story, and let me show where we need to learn.

Perhaps, my hearer, I have hitherto missed you. Perhaps I have been dull and slow. I have been dull, or you have been dull, because it did not seem to apply to you up till now, but it certainly does now apply.

Have we not all been guilty of doing what great David could not do? When the water came back to him, it was not only water from the well of Bethlehem, it was more : it was the blood of sacrifice. And he said, "The Lord forbid it me that I should make a drink, that I should simply lavish upon myself, on my physical thirst, on my physical comfort, what is to these men all that is included in the expression 'sacrifice.' It cannot be." David's noble soul understood, as by a flash, what these men had done for him, and how he ought to behave. Now, my Christian brethren, in Communion next Lord's Day we shall be here to eat the bread of Bethlehem and drink of the well before the gate. Shall I simply make a luxury of God's Gift? Perish the thought! Oh! my soul, can this dastard thing be in thee—that while the salvation, for lack of which thou wast groaning and dying, was brought to thee at such infinite cost, thou wilt simply and selfishly make a drink of it? Alas! how many are simply refreshing themselves, coddling and luxuriating themselves in Gospel grace and privileges!

But, besides, as these men's wisdom, love, and power came to David in a material form, a drink of refreshing

water, so God's grace has come to a number of us, not only in the free gift of pardon, and peace, and everlasting life, but God's grace and mercy has come to many of us in a marvellous amount of material comfort, a marvellous amount of money; and all that that means—luxuries, time, and ease, and contentment, the hedge set round about us, while others are sorely tried. My friend, what manner of love ought yours to be in self-sacrifice at every point, at every pore? It would be your reasonable service. How David would have degraded himself in men's estimate for ever if he had drank that water! But as it was well done all through, he put the fitting topstone upon it; he made the whole scene sacramental. He poured it out before the Lord. And when he poured it out, he virtually said, "I give myself to Thee. I am not going to quench my temporal thirst in this water; it is too precious. I give it unto Thee; I find my thirst satisfied, not in drinking and enjoying, but in pouring it out before Thee." That is the proper manner; that is how you enjoy the living water. Take it selfishly, as if you deserve it all, because you are so good and worthy, and the well of water that is before the gate will be like any other water, and you will thirst again; you won't enjoy it; God will withhold the enjoyment. But let Christ's sacrifice produce a self-sacrificing spirit in you—as Christ flung Himself away for you, so fling your life away for God—and you will enjoy it. It has been

brought to you ; lay yourself, body, soul, and spirit, on the altar—it is your reasonable sacrifice. Give now your money, for money is a covenant blessing. It is one rill of the fountain that comes from the well—the spring of Bethlehem.

Your money, your substance, is a covenant blessing ; it is not your own ; it is tinged, sanctified by the blood of the Great Sacrifice, like this water when it came back to David. Your children—are you going to luxuriate in your children, and train them up for the world and its selfish ends ? So did not David. These children, well-springs of deep gladness in our hearts, must be poured out before the Lord, as our good brother Mr. Wales is pouring out that son of his before the Lord, by giving him to the evangelization of China. 'Tis what we all must do. As Hannah of old, like another David, longed with that deep, unspeakable longing, “ Oh for a son ! ” and when she got the son, *she flung him away on God !* she dedicated him and said, “ He belongeth to the Lord as long as he liveth.” And thus she found the highest enjoyment in him. Yours, your substance, your children, all that you are and have, and all you expect to be, my brother and my sister, it came from God, and must go back to Him, or the river has lost its course and wastes itself in the sand. As the rivers rise from the ocean, drawn up by the mighty power of the sun, descend in rain, form into streams, and so return—so all things



came to us from the love of God, and back into that ocean they must all return. Ah! far better than my tongue can bring it out, the Spirit of God shows us how selfish we have been, how unlike David, and how unlike David's Greater Son. How God has lavished upon us the results of His wisdom, and love, and might; has broken through the host of hell, who barricaded the way between us and the fountains of life. He has opened up a path for us; He has brought us everlasting gladness and strength. And what has happened? So many of us are wasting it upon ourselves; showing that we have not the spirit that brought the blessing to us. If any man have not the spirit of Christ, the spirit of self-sacrifice, he is none of His. He that loveth his life, shall lose it. He that drinks this water selfishly, shall lose it; but he that poureth it out before the Lord—he that hateth his life, shall find it unto eternal life.

It is the mystery of the Cross. May God reveal it in our own hearts and lives. "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

"Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;  
Take my moments and my days,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my love: my Lord, I pour  
At Thy feet its treasure-store.  
Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, only, all for Thee!" Amen.



# Regent Square Pulpit.

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THE PRODIGAL SON'S EPITAPH.

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## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE CHURCH,

BY THE

REV. JOHN McNEILL.

TEXT—Psalm cxix. 55-56.

HAVING preached twice to-day already—this afternoon to a Welsh audience, for about an hour—I have, I fear, spent a good deal of both physical and mental energy. Will you allow me, then, to-night to give a simple evangelical address upon the text? These words, of course, bring us back again to the line of thought in the parable of the Prodigal Son, which we have just now read. This is the Old Testament story of the Prodigal Son. What you have in the New Testament, set forth in wondrous detail by our Lord in His inimitable story, you have condensed into this brief epitome of the experience of the man who wrote the Psalm. There, as here, you have the history of a man who once lived, and of whom it is implied here, and expressed there, that he wandered on the wrong track; that he came to the end of that—he came to himself, he wandered back again, and brought himself into all temporal and eternal blessing by his return.

“I thought on my ways, and turned my feet into Thy testimonies.” It is just, I sometimes think, what one might have expected to be seen on the headstone of the Prodigal Son, after he died and was buried. We have ceased to

think of him as a lay figure in a religious story, merely set up for the purpose of illustration. Because *Christ* told the story, we think of him as a real man, and follow his course after he returned. We hope he lived long and did well, and that in the end of the day he redeemed the follies and disasters of its early part; then, at last, filled with years and honours, he lay down and died, and was buried. "Devout men carried him to his burial, and made lamentations over him;" and we will suppose that, as they do in this country, they put up a headstone and inscription. If so, I cannot think of an inscription more suitable than our present text: "Here lies a man who thought on his ways, and turned his feet to God's testimonies; and made haste, and delayed not to keep His commandments."

This is the record of an experience. The Lord grant we may find, as we go through it, that we are occupying ourselves with our own experience; and if it has not been so with ourselves until now, may we begin the experience recorded here to-night.

It is—to change the figure—an entry in the spiritual diary of the man who wrote the Psalm. It is one of those little autobiographical bits that are one of the elements which give to the Psalms their perennial interest. They so often come down to our own level and our own experience; they so often, like all good and true poetry, express what we were all thinking of, and when it is expressed for us, we lift our hands and say, "Dear me, how true! It is a wonder I never thought of saying that myself." So here you have a little autobiographical bit; one of those things which keep the Psalms in a state of great freshness and interest for all our hearts. We find we are surveying our own joys, and speaking of our own sorrows, when we are being led by that much-tried man, the sweet singer of Israel, who sobbed and sang the Psalms of David.

I wonder if we keep a diary? I don't know if we do, or do not. It is said the "vice" of diary-keeping is that the

entries are often made with a view to subsequent publication. If so, perhaps it is as well we should not ; but at least let us know that God is keeping a diary for us. He has kept it, as we sometimes say in the children's hymn—as though the idea were childish :—

“ For we know the Lord of glory  
 Always sees what children do,  
 And is writing now the story  
 Of their thoughts and actions too.”

If there is anything that grown men want to remember, it is that God is writing our diary. Listen to the scratching of the pen behind the arras ! Has God had occasion, do you think, to enter into the diary of your spiritual history such an entry as we find here, by His grace, in the diary of the man who wrote the Psalms ; I am not going to say it was David's in these critical days. We will not quarrel with the critics, but simply speak of the man who wrote the Psalms—David, or the other man. Do you think God has had good occasion to write this entry ? I want to get at the root of the idea of experimental religion to-night, with the little strength I have. Has He had good cause to write, on such and such a day, known to Him, in such and such an hour, that you were born again, that you were converted, that you were turned from sin and self to grace and Christ ? It is time the entry was in, for there are black and shameful entries opposite your name and mine to a great extent, and it will need every entry which will avail to redeem the record. That which I have named is the only entry that will save it from being a damning indictment against us in the day when the Judgment is set, and the dead, both small and great, are gathered before God, and the books are opened, and the dead are judged out of things that are written in the books. The diaries will be brought out, and our eternal state will be fixed by the record of our diary that God with impartial pen has kept. That will be reading for some of us ! This

will redeem it—this red-letter entry,—only this, all this, nothing less than this : “ I thought on my ways, and turned my feet to Thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep Thy commandments.” Do not let any one turn away, saying, “ I am not included, for I have not wandered ; I am not a prodigal.” My friend, you have. I am face to face with a congregation that is either somewhere on the out-going journey from God, or somewhere on the in-going journey back to God, holiness, and heaven. But we all started on the out-going track ; we are born upon it, “ we go astray from the womb.” “ All we like sheep have gone astray ; we have turned every one to his own way.” You got off into the far country on your way, and I got on mine ; but every one turned to his own way—a departure from God. Some of us go blundering on through the mud and mire of drunkenness, swearing, licentiousness, and open sinning ; that is our way to the far country. Some of us go along the macadamized road of self-righteousness and church-going and sermon-hearing ; that is our way to the same outer darkness and the same far country. Therefore this text becomes one of pressing personal importance ; it is the record of a tremendously essential experience of every soul descended from Adam.

There are two or three things that mark off this essential experience. First of all we have here a pregnant expression, “ I thought on my ways.”

“ I thought on my ways.” A man rises before us ; he tells us plainly that the beginning of true religion with him lay in this, in personal thinking, “ I thought on my ways.” The beginning lies there. Now, I speak to people who pride themselves, I have no doubt, “ that they are thinkers, and they pride themselves that they are hard-headed people, that dust is not to be thrown in their eyes, and they judge and they discern, and they examine what is set before them.” I am delighted to meet with such an audience. A preacher of the Gospel asks for nothing better



than that. "I speak unto wise men: judge ye what I say: to the law and to the testimony;" if I speak not according to that Word, it is because there is no light in me; and if you speak not according to the same Word, the same to you—there is no light in you. "I thought on my ways." *The beginning lies in serious thoughtfulness.* When will we learn in all the churches, when will we learn in the midst of all our religiosity, that it is possible to miss the one door, and never once to enter in, for the door is somewhat lowly and obscure? It is not high and over-arching and conspicuous; it is this, "I thought on my ways." All blessedness springs from that grain of mustard-seed, "I thought on my ways." Religion is not magic, it is miracle: but it is not jugglery; it is not witchcraft; it is not being—what is that latest jugglery that is out?—it is not being "hypnotized," as talked of in the newspapers; it is not any of these things. It is a daylight business: it is open and honest, and done in the daylight of clear understanding. "*I thought.*" You never put your intellect to a higher use than when you turned its powers upon your own ways, enlightened by the surest guide—the Word of God. You never come into any meeting with a fuller consent of all your intellectual and moral powers than the meeting in which the Gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ is being preached. I rather fear that many people think that, while you need to take your intellect with you when you go to hear a lecture on philosophy or on science, you can bring your addled head when you come to hear the Gospel. Get rid of that idea. Bring your best brains with you when you come to hear God's Word. Nothing more needs thinking on my part, and strenuous thinking on your part. God's Word is not a trifle; God's Word is not to be easily spoken, nor easily and off-handedly listened to. "I thought on my ways;" that is the beginning of all experimental religion, and that is the only thing; because it begins

there, *therefore conversions are so uncommon among us.* That is why. The grand difficulty is that almost all men are essentially feather-headed as regards eternal salvation. We are all thus, until God comes with power and steadies our heads, and enables us thoughtfully to look for a brief time at the things of the soul in the light of His eternal truth. "I thought;" that is the beginning; to think for ourselves. Do not let me do your thinking for you. No, no; it is not "I thought on my sermon," but "I thought on my ways." In God's providence I may be a great help to you, or I may not be, but the thing has to be done by yourselves. It is your own soul that is the issue at stake, and the thinking that will save it must be done by that soul's powers themselves. "I thought on my ways." As I have sometimes put it, we deal hardly with the Roman Catholic, and say to him, "You do not think for yourself; you are led by the nose by the priest;" and he could fling back to us this, "Neither do you; you are led by the minister, by the parson; and all the difference between us is a difference of spelling." And virtually he is right. Many Protestants make priests of their ministers. You make us priests in the bad old sense, in spite of us. Do what we will, you simply make us do your religion for you, and that is all the Catholic does with his priest. Now, it is a great advantage that we do not mumble in the Latin tongue. We give you the Gospel, but you are to listen, you are to think, and you are to decide. "I thought on my ways"—a man who thought for himself, that was the beginning with him of all his blessings. *Are you doing it?* For there is an essential thoughtlessness in all our hearts, naturally, as regards the Gospel. You will get men who sit under the best preaching intellectually, and from the point of view of interest and of power to awaken the heart and the conscience and emotions, and they sit, and they sit, and they grow white, and they grow old, and they die, and leave no sign that ever once they were wakened up to think for themselves about their

eternal drift and destiny. Look at that lady who sat under the preaching of Murray McCheyne in Dundee! Then, through God's grace, conversions were taking place that stood all the test of time as long as the subjects of them lived. She sat there in the front gallery—and this is a word for front-gallery sinners—she sat, and listened, and admired the preaching with all its solemnity and piercing power, and saw and felt the deathlike, breathless hush of the people, and yet never once took it into her own soul, and said, "It is for me." She was never able to say, "I thought on my ways." Some of you here to-night, how does it stand with you? Let me run the risk of offending you and driving you away, especially the people who run after preachers. You are here in Regent Square to-night because your favourite preacher is away from town, and when he comes back, you will be back, and if any new star appears in the horizon you will be there; and yet all through it you are not able to say, "I thought on my ways." My friends, what a hell of unquenchable fire you are preparing for yourselves!

While the stream of the minister's sermon is flowing, the mill-wheel of your thinking is going; but after the sermon stops, how long does the mill-wheel turn? When the sluice is shut down, and the mill-lead is turned off, how long does the mill go? Its own momentum carries it a short time indeed; and with many of us, after earnest sermons which did arouse us and set the wheels of our machinery a-whirring, cease. Before we get home, our thinking machinery has come again to a dead stand.

Secondly, he tells us *he thought about himself*. It is very obvious, very trite, very commonplace, but it is the road to heaven. "I thought on my ways." Now, will you begin to think of your own ways a little for yourself, as I shall try to think of mine for myself. "I thought on my ways." He ceased to think about other people, and fastened his gaze upon his own heart and his own soul; he communed

with his own spirit ; he talked to his own heart upon his bed, did this man who wrote the Psalms. Therefore he was the great deep-hearted man he was. Think for yourself about yourself ; for when we are awakened to personal thought there is no more interesting subject to a man than himself. To ourselves we ought to be in every sense of the term interesting creatures. And this text helps the preacher, it relieves him of a great responsibility that ought never to be put on him. My friend, do not wait for a sermon from my lips, or from those of any other man ; that will be expecting another to do for you what no sermon possibly can. You can do it for yourself. I do not know your ways ; you are a deep mystery to me. You do not know my ways. We have a surface knowledge of each other. Once a week we meet, and beyond that, what do I know of the real drift and current of this unending existence of yours ? I can only see the surface current, and the winds that blow and curl and crisp the water on the top of it, but of the deep, strong under-currents that flow through, what can I know ? Think of your own ways, save your own soul. Where you sit, let memory bring out of the past years whatever the years contain, known only to your own memory, and to your own God. Do not expect me to work miracles. I don't know your ways, I don't know the secrets that lie within your own ken. If I did, God knows I would use them, God knows I would preach them to you ; I would spread them out before you, till your heart stood still with this thought, " God Almighty must have told that man all my ways." But I do not, though you do ; and all that God asks me to do is this : to compel you to think for yourself about yourself. There is no mystery, no magic, no jugglery nor witchcraft about it.

Your own ways ! When a man begins to think about his ways, there are three channels' into which he may run the current of his personal, independent thinking. You do not

need to read the hundred best books, nor to be a reader at all; sit down and read the book of your own heart, your own past, your own present; feel the drift of things about you, and then act accordingly. Feel whether the road you are travelling has an up cast in it. If it is going up hill, and is difficult to follow, thank God for that; that is the right track; if the road you travel on is easy, and you do not need to compel yourself to go, examine it, my friend; that is a bad sign. I doubt you are drifting; I doubt the anchor is up. If the anchor were down and holding, there would be a bubbling and commotion at the bow, simply because the anchor held, and you were stemming the stream. But if there is no commotion, and simply a gentle and pleasing rocking, I am afraid you are drifting; I am afraid you are sweeping on, and you will shoot Niagara before you think.

Two or three channels into which we may run our independent thinking. First, *Who am I*—these essential, innate, inborn notions—*Who am I? Where am I? Where am I going?* All that is covered by the expression “thinking of one’s ways.”

*Who am I?* The Bible and my own conscience give the only and the sure answer to that question, What is man? Ask philosophy, ask science, and, to their infinite shame, they are not quite sure whether we are gradually developed, not yet perfectly-developed monkeys—or donkeys maybe—they don’t know which, nor whether we are going up or back. They have not made up their minds yet. They will tell us next week, and contradict it the week after that.

*Who am I?* A “germ,” a “protoplasm.” What pitiful answers these men give. I know there is some good in them, but you have put them in a corner when you ask them to give a plain answer to a plain man on a plain and desperately, intensely personal question, “What is man”? *Who am I?* Between my finger and thumb (when holding a few leaves of God’s Book) there is what is of more value



as a contribution to that A B C question, "Who am I?" than is contained in all that ever the philosophers wrote, either ancient or modern. God's Word says—my own conscience rings responsive to it—I am an immortal soul. I am a living, thinking, not material, but spiritual being, surrounded with the material for a little, yet conscious that I am not of it—in it, but not of it—rising continually above it, and showing that there are powers in me far beyond the seen, the material, and the physical. That is the answer. An immortal soul; God breathed into our nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. There is in us a spark of God's own kindling, and God shall die the day I die. That is to say, I shall never die—never, *never*. My body goes down, but my body is not I no more than my coat is I. *I* can do without one, *I* can do without the other. I may lose a limb, I may lose one limb after another, but still I preserve my sense of being *I*—I still, the whole, round, personal, solid individual *I*. You see it when people are dying, up to the very last moment, conscious, thinking, sensible, intelligent, so much of them decaying, suffering, but the spark there, and, to the last that we see of it, indestructible. The old heathen poet was far ahead of some of these modern ones when he said—"Non omnis moriar" ("I shall not all die").

The weakest-headed thing that the devil has done in these days is to start that old rubbish of a theory, that has no sound phil—even philosophy, at the bottom of it—that we are not immortal. It is not worth arguing with. I admire the bold spirit of that infidel who contemptuously cast it aside and said, "Whether in heaven or hell, he felt he was everlasting." That is the essential soul of a man speaking out for its author, God, and declaring its indestructible nature. That is who we are—immortal souls. Think of it. Born never, never, *never* to go out of conscious existence. Here or within the veil always to live, always to be conscious. I am to live, to think, to feel either the



bliss no language can express, or the gnawing worm that never dies. It is a fearful thing to live. It is an awful, it is a stupendous thing to be in for the swing of a never-ending existence.

You know what Christ said about one unturned sinner, and it is true of them all: "Good had it been for that man," was the only thing Christ could think of. "Good had it been for that man had he never been born"—a good, alas! that could never, never come his way, for he *had* been born.

Then where am I? The Bible and our own experience answer that. Where are we? On the most uncertain footing you can possibly imagine. That is where we are just now, and always here in time. The great characteristic of this life is its uncertainty; "here to-day and gone to-morrow." A little while ago we were not here, not one of us; a little while hence we shall be here no longer. "Man dieth and passeth away; man giveth up his spirit, and where is he?" The place that once knew us shall soon know us no more for ever. That is where we are, on that uncertain footing. A little while ago a wave out of the past eternity cast us up like driftwood here on the shores of time, and a little while hence a wave from the eternity that is coming will sweep and carry us back with itself into the eternity that is to be. Landed here for a while on this narrow neck of land, between the two great seas, the eternity out of which we came, and the eternity to which soon we are going. How often God brings home to us the uncertainty of our life here! How it ought to tell for the Gospel! How it ought to tell on this text, and lead us to a meditation of our ways, and to getting them put right and straight and sure for eternity! Here to-day, and gone to-morrow. If any man stood up in this house and said, "Sir, your statement is exaggerated; I am perfectly sure that by this time to-morrow (Monday night) I will meet you at the gate outside Regent Square Church," the universal sense of this audience would condemn that man as a madman or

a fool. We all feel it would be virtual blasphemy for any human being to speak in terms of certainty for even twenty-four hours ahead. When you put it that way you see how uncertain life is; and it is uncertain. And then how this fact is emphasized! Men and women continually cut down, passing into eternity; while we are almost turning to speak to them—God help us!—they are gone. Is that the end of man? Shall a tree have a more certain lease of life than a man? This cannot be the end.

Upon Clydeside, where I come from, one afternoon, on a busy working day, upwards of a hundred men on board a ship newly launched—upwards of a hundred carpenters, with their tools in their hands—suddenly went through into eternity. Continually, by terrible things in righteousness, God is doing His best to sober us: "Oh, man, prepare for eternity!"

Here, for a moment, like a bird there that leans on the twig, and the twig bobs and bends with its weight, and then, as you look, the bird is gone and the twig still shaking from under its departed feet. Such is the life of man. But, alas! how little these thoughts impress us.

"As from the wing no scar the sky retains,  
The parted wave no furrow from the keel. . . .  
So dies in human hearts the thought of death."

God grant it may not be so with us, but that to-night, believing and impressed by it, we may shape ourselves for the great eternity. Said an ancient, "Turn to God the day before you die." His disciples said to him, "Master, we do not know the day of our death." "Therefore," he said, "turn to-day."

And another thought, another channel in which we can run the current of our independent thinking: not only, Who am I? and Where am I? but *Where am I going?* And the Bible tells us more than the vague word eternity. The Bible tells us where we are going. The Bible distinctly gives the destination of every soul hearing me to-day, the preacher included with the audience. We *must* all appear—take it literally, if you like—put in an appearance before the Judgment Seat of Christ. Think of it, man, there in the gallery, and woman, down there. Individual souls all over this place, you and I must take our turn, we are to drift across the blinding

blaze of light that streams from the Judgment Seat of Christ. We must, like specks in the sun, take our turn of appearing in front of the Judgment Seat of Christ to be inter-penetrated, to be shot through and through with that piercing light that will discover everything. "Neither is there anything that shall not be made manifest," made glitteringly plain, as you drift across the blinding light of the Judgment Seat of Christ. In that fierce light every black speck will shine out with horrible distinctness, you may be sure. That is where we are going, not to heaven first, nor to hell first, but to the Judgment Seat of Christ, with the Son of God on it. Then the eternal doom! As surely as you have heard all this from my unworthy lips to-night, so surely you will stand before Him. That is where we are going — "to meet Thee, O Christ of God; to meet Thee." It ought to be a grand thought; who should be afraid to meet Jesus? "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild" — why should it be a name of terror at death and judgment? When He was here on earth the children ran to meet Him. They climbed up into His arms. No doubt they kissed Him, and He kissed them. We are going to meet Jesus, and yet while I speak the hearts of some of you here cringe with fear or turn away with aversion. You do not like Jesus! Man, your hell has begun in that feeling, know what your hell will be. You do not like Jesus; God grant you may get put right to-night, so that the Judgment Day may have no terror for you, and that the Judge may be your Friend. That is where we are going.

"Great God, what do I see and hear?  
The end of things created,  
The Judge of mankind doth appear,  
On clouds of glory seated.  
The trumpet sounds, the graves restore  
The dead which they contained before;  
Prepare, my soul, to meet Him."

It will be a grand meeting if you are converted, if you are His friend. Lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh!

We shall see Him, and He shall say to us, "Come, ye blessed; or, 'Depart, ye cursed.'"

"I thought on my ways, and turned my feet." Notice further, that our text describes a *practical thinker*. He turned his feet. After all, perhaps, thinking is not so uncommon. But *practical* thinking is very rare, and it is the measure of progress of the kingdom of God amongst us. It is not enough simply to listen, as you are doing to-night, and I trust the light of eternity is on your face and heart; but there is to be a decision. It is a thing to do, to turn the feet. Is that done? Have you thought on your ways, and, finding you were wrong, come to a decision and carried it out? "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet." I am going to-day through London, and I find, as I often do, that I am going the wrong road, and somebody tells me the way to go. He says, "Sir, you are going in a completely wrong direction." Well, what would you think of me if, after I am convinced that the man is right and I am wrong, I said to myself, "I will think about that," and still walk along the wrong road thinking about it? There is no good done until I not only think, but turn my feet and go along in the right direction. Let that be a simple illustration for some of you. You are, some of you, concerned about your souls; your presence here is a proof of that. Perhaps that is what brings you here. There is no great attraction in the audience, though it is good, or in the singing, although it is not bad; but that is not the thing that draws you and keeps you like a moth fluttering around the flame. You would fain go away, and you cannot. It is this: your soul is in the wrong way, and is wanting to be put right for eternity. That is what has brought you. Now, this is what you have to do next: decide for Christ. There is a turning point, and the turning time is *now*. The turning point is the Lord Jesus Christ lifted up in the preaching of the Gospel. Turn with Him; turn at Him, in your thoughts, in your purposes, in your plans, in your opinion of Him. Believe in Him, and your soul is turned.

There is a high and elevated spiritual side, but I don't enter on that. When you have had *the common sense* to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, from that moment your ways are changed, and your destiny is determined by the Blessed One. I think I have used this illustration before, how, when we take our Sabbath School children into the country and the little ones run races, I have gone away down

the field and become the turning point. I have cried back to the intending runners that they were to run to me—I was the turning point, and they were to turn round and go back again to the goal. Well, so Jesus is the turning point in your life. I lift Him up before you as you run, to compel you to stop at Him, and to go no farther past Him. Swing round Him. Go back with Him, all along the course that is destined through all eternity. I did not see any children on that field running about like dizzy geese, asking, “Where is the turning post?” I was there, large, broad, visible, and easily discovered. It is so with Jesus Christ, save that He is not visible, He is not material, but He is far better as He is. He is visible to the mind, the thoughts, the motions, and the desires. Oh, I wish I could fill the church with Him, and make it impossible for you to move out of this place without saying to Him, “Yes, Lord,” or, “No, Lord.” That is what I am trying to do—so to fill your soul with the image of Him, and the idea of Him, and the presence of your Saviour, a really human being, and yet God—having a name like you, a being like you, and a personality as you have; not a mere myth or a phantom, but Christ Jesus who lives, who loves, who wept, who died, who rose, who is *coming again*.

Christ, *Christ*, Christ the Lord, to be loved, served, trusted. That is the Christ who is set before you; and, if you go by Him, it is in spite of Him and me. Turn your feet, then. The Prodigal might have sat by the side of the swine and bemoaned his drunken folly until he died, but that would have done him no good. He not only formed resolutions, but he carried them out to the letter. He arose and came to his father.

This is the last word I have to say: “I made haste, and delayed not to keep Thy commandments.” Hurry up, my friend. Don’t you hear the footsteps of Death coming hurrying up behind you? “In such an hour as you think not” Death will spring upon you, and how will it be with you then? What if you get the experience of that friend Paton, the missionary to the Taunese, in the New Hebrides, whose life, as published, has been called more thrilling than romance? Suppose you had been the missionary’s wife out there, engrossed in her work and in her husband’s work, standing, as I stand, full of life, full of hope, and



suddenly from behind, in a moment, a savage buried a tomahawk in her back, and with another stroke nearly severed the head from the body. Death, come it soon or late, tomahawks us very much like that. How will it be with us in that hour, when we, like dear Elmslie—God bless his memory!—shall pass away? How will it be with us? Make haste; let there be no delay in the turning; be quick. Decide for Christ now, now! “Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.” “To-day, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.” Oh, come to Jesus! It is a wonderful experience, conversion. That we should live on, and on, and on, going out from God, until hell’s hopeless gates rise on our view, and that we should be stopped, turned, and get a hope of everlasting life through grace! Verily the converted sinner is a man to be wondered at. Then turn, turn; why will ye die?

- “Sinner, is thy heart at rest?  
Is thy bosom void of fear?  
Art thou not with guilt oppressed?  
Speaks not conscience in thine ear?
- “Can this world afford thee bliss?  
Does it chase away thy gloom?  
Flattering, false, and vain it is,  
Tremble at the worldling’s doom.
- “Think, oh, sinner! on the end,  
See the Judgment Day appear.  
Thither must thy spirit wend,  
There thy righteous sentence hear.
- “Wretched, ruined, helpless soul,  
To the Saviour’s blood apply;  
He alone can make thee whole,  
Fly to Jesus, sinner, fly.”

God speed your flight into the arms of Christ, here and now! AMEN.



# Regent Square Pulpit.

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THE CURE FOR CARE.

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## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE CHURCH,

SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 12TH,

BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

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TEXT—Philippians iv. 6, 7.

OUR text begins, if you *can* break in here (it is hardly fair), but if you can break in at all, at the 6th verse, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds ‘through’ or ‘in’ Christ Jesus.” It is a very charming letter, the letter to the Philippians, written by Paul from his captivity in Rome. It is more of a *real* letter; it is not so much a theological treatise as the Epistle to the Romans. And unlike, for example, the Epistle to the Galatians, it is not a fiery philippic or polemic against his enemies and the “spoilers” of the Gospel. Down towards the end, the “procuring cause” of the Epistle comes out clearly. It is a kind of receipt for money received; but oh, so unlike our commercial receipts! Still, sometimes we manage to write on “With thanks,” which is this Epistle,

with the "With thanks" very much extended and expanded. The Apostle had been, to use our common phrase, hard-up. There was a rule then for captives by which friends could show their kindness; and these Philippians sent Paul supplies again and again, while others seemed to forget the Apostle. Aye, the very believers in Rome seemed to forget him; those who came out to meet him as far as the Three Forums. When, somehow or another, Paul got into hardships and distress, the deputation seems to have fought shy of him. But, at any rate, the fact remains that if these Philippians had not ministered again and again to his necessities, Paul's comforts would have been very greatly diminished. They remembered him; they had been kind to him; and this is Paul sending back the empty basket—"the returned empty"—"With thanks" to those who, by Epaphroditus, had sent it so full. Only he cannot send it quite empty, but puts in this little letter; and we all feel he has more than repaid, infinitely more than repaid, all that ever the Philippians did for him. There are some people, and very independent-minded people they are too, who yet in a matter of giving and receiving show such dignity and gentlemanliness, as to make you feel you are for ever their debtor, because they *allowed you* to help them in a time of need.

Paul so overflows—read the Epistle, and you will feel it better than I can bring it out—he so overflows in his way of giving back his thanks, that he makes the Philippians feel debtors for ever to the recipient of their bounty. See how he runs on: "Rejoice in the Lord alway," says this man, with the chain clanking on his wrist; "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand." That

guardsman of his was to Paul a continual reminder of a greater Emperor and a greater Presence. "The Lord is *at hand*. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." We must never take this first expression of our text—I would say—away from the immediate context. "Be over anxious, be full of care for nothing," seems to be an exaggerated word. Oh, there is something rises in this worldly, anxious, toiling, moiling, industrious heart of ours, and says, "Now, now, now; no more of this, please! We may read it in the Bible; but at the bottom it is a bit of Bible teaching that has not got very far into us." "Take no thought for to-morrow," when we lay our plans far away into next year? "Take no thought for to-morrow," for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself? Be as free from care as the birds that fly, as the lilies that grow and blow in the sun? "Be full of care for nothing?" And we put our thumbs into our armholes and lean back in the big chair at the office and say, "That's all very well, but it won't do down town." "Be full of care for nothing." "It is an exaggeration, an utter absurdity of other-worldliness." Yes, but when we look at the Bible statement in its own setting, its most soaring utterances become plain, ordinary common-sense.

"The Lord is at hand." That is the setting. Think of that. Get that great thought into the mind, that the Lord is as near to you as Paul's jailor was to him, with all that that right hand presence represents of being watched, noted, guarded, held strictly in hand for life or death. You are being "shadowed." God is the Shadower; attending your

down-sitting and your uprising: the Judge is at the door.

It is because that utterance is like a thunder-clap that this word comes next. "Be over anxious about nothing." The other day, for example, back there in the summer-time, you were driving through this London, down yonder about the Mansion House corner, and you were saying to your friend on the top of the 'bus, "What a tremendously noisy place London is!" The noise of the streets, the noise of the street-cries, the shrill whistling of the railway engines, piercing through everything, when suddenly the heavens have grown black, and right overhead from the concave of heaven comes the lightning's gleam and the awful crash of thunder. How little London and the Mansion House corner became, when God thus said, "I am at hand." Even down there in all the roar and rattle of this great city, which is the heart of the world, that voice reduces all other things to a mere whisper. So with this text. Do not begin at "Be careful for nothing." Begin at "The Lord is at hand."

Listen to that thunder-clap that breaks in upon our toiling and moiling, and see if your soul does not get quieter if all its earth-born noise and commotions are not overwhelmed by that ear-filling, soul-subduing thought, God is at my door; my Lord is at hand. Therefore, *take it easy*, in the true sense, and keep a tranquil mind. Therefore, silence, order, attention! Eyes front! "Be full of care for nothing. The Lord is at hand." It is what you have in the 1st of Corinthians, in the 7th chapter, very much the same idea, and working to the same end. The 29th verse: "But this I say, brethren, the time is short," or rather, as the Revised Version would have it, "But this I say, brethren, from henceforth the time is

shortened." Christ's coming, Christ's dying, Christ resurrection, the pouring out of the Holy Ghost, these have mightily shortened the world's programme, and are making it creep in quicker every moment we live. The time has been shortened, accelerated; all things pushed and hurried on since Christ has come; since God's purpose has been so clearly unfolded in the Cross, the Resurrection, and the Promised Second Advent. "The time is shortened from henceforth. It remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep as though they wept not; and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy as though they possessed not; and they that use this world as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away; but I would have you to be free from care." He comes back to our text. Is it now an absurdity? Is that too much of the other world? Is that not plain, sober, common sense, even if nothing more had been said? "Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be" in sitting loose to the world, and making it to be the very secret of our existence to realize, *to discern the Lord's Presence!* As the eyes of an handmaid are towards her mistress, so our souls wait upon thee, O God. "Be full of care for nothing." Paul is entitled to say it after saying, "The Lord is at hand." Always when we quote the one, let us remember the other. Let us remember that thunder-roll, which even Christian ears so greatly need, to awaken us, to stimulate us, to take us away from fret and worry, from joys and sorrows that are false and vain.

However, that is not all. He is only beginning, and we are not to interrupt him too suddenly. We are to look

before and after. "Be full of care for nothing; for the Lord is at hand. In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." We are to be "free from care," because we are called to prayer; "full of care for nothing," because "in everything" we are provided for. It is the old, old "Care not," "Fear not," which all through Scripture are the believer's Sword and Shield.

Now, I shall not attempt any fanciful division of my own of this self-dividing text. But let us try to get a hold of it *verbatim et literatim*, and see if we cannot apprehend, if not comprehend it. Care, care, is the one great burden of nineteen-twentieths of the people of this town. Care! It is easy for us to sing "Begone, dull care," but you cannot get rid of it by singing; you end your song, and fetch a sigh, the same as usual. When the Apostle says, "Be without care," he is not at all meaning that we should be like him who lets things sit lightly on him; who snaps his thumbs, and whistles, and sings. He is a heedless, foolish, light-headed, and light-heeled fellow, who for a little while may dance and sing; but we all know he is simply postponing his sorrow; and his settling-day will come swiftly, with a vengeance. Neither when he says "Be without care" does he ask us to be like the Stoic who has braced his nerves, and is not going to be shaken or moved by anything. You may run a knife into him; he will feel the pain, but he will never show it. He may get all manner of rough knocks and blows in this rough-and-tumble world, but he has set his teeth, and no expression shall escape him to show that he feels or winces. It is not that. For the most part, we can neither be—the great bulk of us—Epicureans, laughing and quaffing, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry,



for to-morrow we die," neither can we be steel-nerved Stoics. Therefore, let us try to be Christians. He strikes the golden mean that lies between the carelessness of the giddy fool who shuts out all sober, serious, conscience-awakening thoughts, and the other extreme of proud self-possession that is as godless and prayerless as can possibly be imagined.

The Christian position is: "I am here in the world; I am like a little child down there in the awful whirl of traffic on a London street-crossing, not knowing where to turn or where to go. I shall certainly, one of these moments, be run over and killed, trampled underneath the horses' feet, or crushed beneath the relentless wheels. But my religion has taught me a secret. A wonderful secret changes my child's helplessness, and foolishness, and want of foresight into Divine wisdom, Divine power, Divine peace. "He that believeth shall not make haste." Our *strength*, then, lies, says the Apostle, in childlike *helplessness*. Have no strength of your own; for that leads to carking care, to corroding anxiety: to carry your own burden is the sure way to find yourself crushed and feckless. Even youths faint and grow weary, and young men utterly fail, when they attempt the burden and battle of life in their own strength. But this is how to win—"in every thing by prayer." The very essence of the meaning of prayer is that I need help beyond my own; that I want help here, now, immediately, of a practical kind. And why many of us do not pray is because we are too strong—strong in our own false, swaggering, blustering strength; strong in our own strength, the very heart of which is utter helplessness, emptiness, and weakness. The reason why others do not fail is because they have discovered that true trust or

faith in the Lord Jesus Christ turns to prayer, turns to supplication, turns to thanksgiving. As the flaming sword wheeled every way to guard the tree of life, so "All-Prayer" burns, and flames, and wheels in every direction, to keep out care, and alarm, and sin, and the devil. Faith for ever turns to prayer, and supplication, and thanksgiving, and the peace of God that passeth all understanding.

First of all the Apostle inculcates a general habit of prayerfulness. "By prayer," he says; and the idea is the general idea of prayer. If you are going to live a victorious, triumphant, calm, joyous, Christian life, be, in general terms, a man, a woman of prayer. Payson has made a true remark when he says, "God gives His answers more to the habit than the act of prayer." Therefore be of a prayerful disposition. That, of course, will only come by exercising a definite, positive act. This is covered by the other phrase, that says, "Sow an act, and you reap a habit." Sow prayerful acts, take time and opportunity, and pray. Thus, you shall reach that general, steady, prayerful disposition referred to in the Apostle's expression, "Pray without ceasing; in every thing give thanks." And the Old Testament is like it. "Be thou in the fear of the Lord" all the day long. My believing brothers and sisters, we must take ourselves away from ourselves, and away from the world and its sin, and away from the present moment, and give ourselves to what Isaiah calls "waiting upon God;" sitting down before the Unseen, Eternal, and Invisible, and praying to Him, pouring out the heart in contemplation of His attributes, His Being, Himself, His Word, and His works. How holy contemplation, in prayer before God, even without definite supplication, calms the mind!

- “How great a Being, Lord, is Thine,  
 That doth all beings keep ;  
 Thy knowledge is the only line  
 To sound so vast a deep.
- “Thou art a sea without a shore,  
 A sun without a sphere ;  
 Thy time is now and evermore,  
 Thy place is everywhere.
- “Who should not fear Thy searching eye ?  
 Witness to all that's true,  
 Dark hell and deep hypocrisy,  
 Lie plain before its view.
- “Motions and thoughts, before they grow,  
 Thy knowledge doth espy ;  
 What unborn ages are to do,  
 Is done before Thine eye.”

Set yourselves to prayer and meditation on that Being, and see if the roar and riot of your heart is not hushed, and cooled, and pacified thereby. “How shall I sing ?” It will burst upon you as you engage in prayer.

- “How shall *I* sing that Majesty,  
 That angels do admire ?  
 Let dust in dust and ashes lie—  
 Sing, sing ye heavenly choir.”

Let us wait on God ; let us go into the holy, searching, calming presence of Him who was, and is, and is to come—the Almighty.

But the Apostle is more minute ; and lest prayer should take a wrong turning, and become a kind of quietism or pietism ; lest it should become a kind of Buddhism, the great secret of which is to get yourself back into Nirvana, nothingness, quiescence, a being swallowed up in the Absolute Being, he speaks of prayer *and supplication*. That surely means here an intenser form of prayer, making your requests known, descending to particulars. And how close you may

descend is covered by that word "everything." Mention everything to God. Now, I really begin more and more to wonder when I hear a great deal of prayer that is going on, I begin to wonder what notion of Jesus of Nazareth, the Object of Prayer (or, rather, God in Christ), many believing people seem to have got. The Apostle plainly indicates that you are to go before God and tell Him your own personal particular want, and in your own way. The idea that we must go to God on stilted language and speak to Him in falsetto, gets no countenance from either the Old Testament or the New.

That our approaches to God, either public or private, are to be something like the approaches of the Lord Mayor to the Queen when she comes to the town end to lay a foundation stone, the language as chaste, not to say elegant and correct and quite as frozen; with attitudes, and tones, and garments, but all stiff and stilted, rigid and frigid—that notion gets no countenance here. Let us think to whom we are speaking. Let us realize who we are. We shall not be irreverent; we shall not rush in heedlessly; we shall not speak vain, idle words; but we shall pray and make supplication with thanksgiving about everything. Yes, everything. Oh, what a relief would come to all our hearts to-day if we understood that God is our Father and Jesus Christ is our Intercessor, and the great privilege of prayer is our own! We would go before the Prince of Wales with very great respect and circumspection, but we would never dream that his own sons are on the same terms that we must be. That is precisely our position with God. Let Him be as great, and holy, and absolute, the great I-AM He is; we are His children, we are His sons, we are His daughters; there is to be no stiltedness, no standbackness. Go to Him, for He

is always Christ, saying, "Come to Me, all ye that labour." There is a human heart, a human feeling, a human sympathy, aye, let me say it with all reverence, a human hatred of sham and mere form at the heart of the great I-AM. Never forget that. Let that take the frost-bite off our souls; let that thaw and melt our hearts within us so that we shall understand we are on such terms with Him who sent His Son to die for us as our children are with us, only still more free and still more helpful. Go to God with everything.

"Let us be simple with Him, then ;  
Not distant, stiff, and cold ;  
As if our Bethlehem could be  
What Sinai was of old."

What a power it is ! These are two arms, so to speak, of the soul—prayer and supplication. I remember when I was a lad, long ago, I used to go with father's breakfast to the place where he worked ; and while he took his breakfast, I did about all the mischief a young fellow could well do in the time. Especially I could not keep my hands off machinery that was all round about the place where he worked. More particularly was I interested in the crane. I say "crane" in deference to the English language ; I would, of course, much rather say "*cran*." And I remember how I discovered the use, and the abuse (to my loss), of cranes. Partly by my own bungling, and partly by my father's instruction, I found out how to work that piece of machinery. There is a stone to be uplifted, that no power of human arms, young or old, could lift. You fasten the hooks of the chain on opposite sides of the stone ; you come back to the handle, and you wind in the slack—that must be done—you wind in the slack chain until the "bite"

comes where the strength is needed. And that is like prayer. We must go to God *and pray* ; to pull in the slack rope, to get as near to Him as we can. The exercise of worship, of prayer, brings us near to Him ; but supplication is when the chain is tight, and you feel the bite upon your muscles ; the weight to be removed, gripping on the chain and upon your strength.

And supplication is just putting out your strength about *this special "block ;"* putting on the pressure, turning the handle which turns the drum ; and lo, before you are aware, that solid mass is elevated, and you can see the daylight between the stone and the ground ! It is so with the exercise and application of spiritual lever-power. Now, with this great business of prayer, do not put anything outside the lift ; do no leave *anything* outside these "shears," or "slings." Put in *everything*. There are all the great blocks and lumps of your sins and offences ; put them in the bottom, and then put on top all your business cares ; put on top of that your health cares, your son's health, your daughter's health, things connected with your wife and children, all your successes, all your joys—put on everything, *every mortal thing* ; yes, mortal, 'tis no slip. And as I did once when I was "putting on" for my dear father ; I wanted to tax his strength, and I piled into the box, into which the stones were put, I piled in everything that I could possibly tug and haul and get to go in, and then sat down on the top of it myself, while he lifted *us all* ! So with God ; cast all your care upon Him, and He will lift you : you will be up before you know it. Every *care*. I am looking on a well-known friend, who is present with us—he must pardon me for mentioning his name—Dr. Barnardo, the man who has the largest family to look after on the face of the earth. These



thousands of children, put them into the box, sit yourself on the top of it, "Cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you."

I discovered, when I am talking about cranes, I discovered what you would soon discover, the difference between what is called the single and the double power. When a cranesman has worked with the single until he can do no more, he pulls the gearing out into what is called double power, when lo, what before was beyond his strength, now that the gearing is altered, he can lift and swing with ease. *Supplication* is like throwing your crane from the single into the double power. All God's children must have discovered the difference between prayer and supplication. As an old Scotchman said, "There's nae guid (no good) done, John, until you come to close gripps." And supplication is "close gripping." The definite something there that I want done, putting in some real burden and everything that is a burden. Things or great or small if they trouble you. If your eye had got suddenly "bunged up" with dirt, would you have the doctor take out the rough lumps and let the other stay in? You know it must be clean to the very last mote, or you will be pained intensely, and your vision blinded. So with your soul. Why, since the faith of Jesus Christ has come into the heart, it has made it a wonderfully sensitive organ; and just there is why some Christians look worse after their conversion. Things that did not trouble you before trouble you now, because your soul is born again. Because your soul is now shot through with a spiritual sensitiveness that was never there before, and things make it wince, and cringe, and be afraid, that never troubled it before when it was mortified and dead.

Therefore do not let the littlest mote remain troubling your eye. "*In every thing* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Aye, in everything, in everything. I will not stop further to explain "*everything*." That would be waste of time; it would be like trying to explain *t-o*, "to," or *s-o*, "so." Oh, let us cast all upon Him. I have quoted that text, "casting all your care," or, rather, the Old Testament text which is quoted by Peter. In the Hebrew that is: "Cast thy burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain thee." "Cast what He has given thee;" "thy burden" in the original means, "What God has given thee." What a sweet thought that is, that all my cares, and all my trials, and all my troubles were sent. They came from God: then send them back to God by prayer. These cares, as one has said, are like homing pigeons; they came from the throne; they were sent. Let them loose, and tie prayers, and supplications, and thanksgivings under their wings, and they will go right back to the throne, and God will receive them. As Noah took the dove into the ark, so He will take them in. He will lift their wings, and He will untie the little parcels you put there of prayers, and supplications, and thanksgivings. Now, some of us have a whole heartful of these homing pigeons. How many cares, and trials, and troubles, and discomforts, and worries we have! Turn them into so many doves.

Did you ever see homing pigeons? Not long ago I saw a young fellow who had one. He threw it up into the air, where it made two or three strange swirls (it was fifty miles away from its home), and then, with a sudden sweep, the bird was away. So with prayer that is burdened with supplication and thanksgiving. Do not be fretting; they

won't lose their away—that is utterly impossible. “Call upon God, call upon Him in the day of trouble: He will answer thee, and thou shalt glorify Him.”

But then it is to be done with thanksgiving, and I must not run that over. I would not run over this text for the world. I know I have failed with it; it is grand to be wrestling with a text too big for a three-quarter-of-an-hour sermon. “With thanksgiving.” What is that that crane of mine would do again? Thanksgiving is the oil that keeps all the machinery sweet. In everything give thanks. Do not forget thanksgiving, or your prayers will be lop-sided, like birds that have only got one wing, because the devil, that fowler, has shot off the other, and the poor thing cannot fly straight. It is not only supplication or only thanksgiving, but always the two together, “prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.” Listen to the beat of these mighty eagle wings, prayer and thanksgiving; see, how the soul drives onward into the haven of God's light and peace.

The other night I told you about the eagle. Let me tell you again. A friend of a friend of mine, who told me the story, had an eagle. He caught it when young, and had brought it up, as far as could be, like a domestic fowl. He had, in God's providence, to go to the other side of the world, and was selling off everything. He wondered what he should do with his eagle, and the happy thought came to him that he would not give it to anybody, but would give it back to itself—he would set it free. And he opened the place in which it had been kept, and brought it to the back green. How he was astonished! It walked about, feeling as if this were rather bigger than its ordinary run; but that was all. He was disappointed; and he took the great, big bird in his arms, and lifted it, and set it up on

his garden wall; and it turned, and looked down at him. The sun had been obscured behind a cloud; but just then the cloud passed away, and the bright, warm beams poured out. The eagle lifted its eyes, pulled itself up. I wonder was it thinking; can an eagle recollect the crags and the cliffs, the revellings in the tempests of long ago, the joyous thunderings and the flashing lightnings? At any rate, it pulled itself up, and lifted one wing and stretched out—"by prayer and supplication"—and it lifted the other wing—"with thanksgiving"—and it stretched it, and it gave a scream, and soon was a vanishing speck away in the blue of heaven. "Be full of care for nothing." Anxious, disturbed Christian, you are an eagle *living in a hen-house*! Try your wings. "In every thing by prayer and supplication." Come out of the hen-house; you have a bigger run than you think you have. Let your requests be made known unto God. "And the peace of God"—and you will scarcely, perhaps, believe me, but my sermon was to have been upon the peace of God; we have only got through the introduction—"the peace of God, that passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

The Lord bless to us this discourse; may we have received enough to lighten us and strengthen us for to-day. Amen.

# Regent Square Pulpit.

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RESIST THE DEVIL.

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## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE CHURCH, ON SUNDAY EVENING,  
OCTOBER 19TH, 1890,

BY THE

REV. JOHN McNEILL.

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TEXT—Judges xiv. 5-9.

“Behold, a young lion roared against him (Samson). And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or mother what he had done. . . . And after a time he returned . . . and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion. And he took thereof in his hands and went on eating.”

SAMSON, as he comes before us here, will give us our subject. Let me say frankly that I know that in dealing with Samson there are places where you are skating over rather thin ice. But do not let us turn away as if there were something here rather indelicate and “risky.” There is simply here a flesh and blood man—a good deal of flesh and blood—with his good points and his bad; and the suggestion running all through that whatever was in him that is good, and gracious, and desirable has its root and foundation in this, “The Spirit of the Lord came upon him;” and whatever is forbidding and disastrous belongs to the opposite of

that expression, "The Spirit of the Lord left him, and he wist not that the Spirit had departed from him."

I do not hesitate to use Samson to point a moral. 'Tis the way of the Bible, not to speak of humanity and sin in the abstract, but of actual sinful men, and how the Spirit of Holiness can give them power.

"Behold, a young lion roared against him. And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid." Sudden, surprising danger is brought before us here. How true that is of the life of young men still. Are there not, my brothers, temptations that leap upon you—spiritual wickednesses that come upon us unawares and unexpectedly? "Or ever we are aware," our soul is in a crisis in which victory or disaster, holiness or sin are the issues—Christ or Satan, heaven or hell, life or death. This Samson was going down to Timnath on thoughts of love intent, never dreaming of such danger. Do not let us hesitate to talk about his errand; let us neither snigger sillily about it, nor let us drop it as if it were something the pulpit has nothing to do with:—on his way to see his "sweetheart," here is Samson with his very life suddenly in danger. Why should I not talk about this, when so many of you go on the same errand? I do not say it is a wrong road to travel. I have tramped it myself. It is in the providence of God. God speed you and guide you well. God grant you may choose better than Samson. Do not trust to the sight of the eyes in this business.

Well, Samson was not thinking of any danger. He was passing through a vineyard—and vineyards then were open,



as they still are, in Eastern lands—tasting its fruits, possibly, and humming some snatch of a love-song, maybe, when suddenly this crisis came upon him. A young lion roared against him. Thank God for that roar. For there are some sins that destroy a fellow without roaring. The woman was a greater danger than the roaring lion. There was no roaring there. There was tremendous danger. He escaped the one, and more than once failed to escape the other. The springing temptation—the gleaming of the teeth, and the lashing of the tail, and the roaring—gave him time and chance. It was the roar that was the saving thing. When the roar is heard by a manly fellow, there is something inside him that roars too—the love of life roars against death ; deep calls to deep.

And just because the brute roared, it gave the man warning, and roused him. He flung himself upon the lion, and rent him as he would have done a sucking kid. I thank God for the roar ; for the sins that are unmistakable. You know their mission, and their intent, just as if a lion were there in your path, with its flaming eyes and gleaming teeth, and crouching for the spring. You know where you are. You, my young brother, you know them down in the City ; you know every day you live what these temptations mean. They hunt for the precious life ; nothing less than that. Royal Bengal tigers, man-eaters, are these destroyers, that would rather taste human blood, and Christian blood, than any meaner prey. I do not mean to name them. We know them. They war against the soul ; they spring upon us through the eye, and they dart in upon the soul through

some foulness in the ear, like roaring lions. Well, still let us thank God we know where we are. But what are we to do with such temptations? First of all, do not run, so to speak; there is no running. Great as Samson was athletically, I cannot remember any instance where the length of his leg made him any way remarkable in the matter of speed. He had great strength; he could stand and fight, and fight, and fight till his weapon clave to his fist, and he could not unlock it; but I rather think running was not in his line.

There was only one thing—death or victory; and he ran all risks, and flung himself on the brute. So with certain sins. Do not tamper with them; do not dally with them; do not shuffle; do not dodge—you cannot. Do not try, as some one has said, do not try to *think* them down. It is utterly impossible; it is neither philosophical, nor anything else. You cannot think these roaring temptations down. There is just one thing to do—accept them. Now, don't misunderstand me. Take them as they are, in all their ugliness and all their ferocity, and do not be afraid, but by faith and prayer imbrue your hands in their blood. Grip them, bring them out, face them, and slay them before the Lord. And do it quickly; make sure work of it—no half work of these lusts, like springing lions, that war against the soul. The lust for drink; lust of another kind; the lust of the flesh; and the lust of the eye; and the pride of life—which perhaps is one of the greatest destroyers of the young soul—the swelling pride of life, bring it out and put the sword in it up to the haft, and do it even as the conspirator did when he met his foe, long ago in Scottish history;

he dirked him ; he put the knife into him with one stroke ; and then rushed out to his fellow-conspirators, and said, "I think I have slain the Comyn." And another conspirator said, "*Thou thinkest ; but I will mak siccar !*" and he rushed in and stabbed him repeatedly. "Mak siccar"—make sure—that you have faced eye to eye, hand to hand, and foot to foot this particular form of sin, and by the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and that mighty weapon that Bunyan talks about—"All Prayer," thou hast overcome.

Notice the explanation of Samson's strength. How much of the New Testament lies in the Old ! "The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him." My brother, that is gloriously true to-day. Aye, *the only hope* for a clean heart and a pure life in London is the Spirit of Christ Jesus coming mightily upon us. And let us bless God for it, that in this awful and rugged crisis of our souls, there is something always nearer to us than the spring of the tiger—and that is, the spring of the ever-watching Spirit of God. There is One nearer to you than the precipice, even when it yawns at your very feet. There is always a way of escape, a door opened, or a strong Deliverer—greater on your behalf than all those raging beasts that can be against you—the Spirit of the Lord.

See how heaven and earth are mingled in that conflict. In order to tell this story completely, you have to bring in the supernatural—"The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him." Now, men and brethren, if ever our life is to be written—and it is being written—but if it is ever to be

read so as to do good, that control by the Spirit must be known by us; His power must be experienced. I almost dare to put it to some of you: "Have you yet heard whether there *be* any Holy Ghost?" Without Him, ye can do nothing. Without Him, you are bowled over. Without Him, the lion-like temptations, or the snake-like temptations, will lay hold of you and destroy you continually. But with the Spirit of God you are invincible; you have got the secret of the old warrior in classic story, who as often as he touched mother-earth found his strength return to him. No matter how temptations spring upon us, there is aye time to pray, there is aye time to cry, "Lord, haste to help me. Haste, and deliver Thy darling from the power of the dog and the sword of the devil." "Stand," says Paul. "How?" you ask. "Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit," he replies.

"Be filled with the Spirit." "He has given the Holy Ghost to all them that obey Him." I could quote texts for an hour to prove that Christ is present with us always under this aspect. The Third Person of the Trinity, not an "influence"—you cannot slay lions with an "influence." The Spirit of the Lord is revealed to us as a distinct Person, with personal attributes and powers ascribed to Him, even as in the case of the Father and the Son. The Spirit of the Lord is the power by whom our arm is nerved for spiritual conflict.

"And every virtue we possess,  
And every victory won,  
And every thought of holiness  
Are His alone."

Then, my brother and sister, know your strength; fear not; flinch not; fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life. "Greater is He that is for you than all that can be against you." The Spirit of your Father, the Spirit of your Saviour, dwells in you. He by whom the blessed Son of God in human nature was sanctified, is the very Spirit by whom our flesh and heart, when it is weak as water, like wax before the fire in the awful hour of conflict with sin, becomes as a brazen pillar and iron wall, that no assault of hell can overturn. Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Stand in the evil day; and, having done all, stand. Use the Holy Spirit, and you will find that on special occasions, in dangerous moments, in answer to your cry, He "comes upon you," as of old; He "worketh in you mightily." He braces your spiritual nerve and sinew. Your whole soul answers the challenge of the Evil One with a thundering No! He furnishes you with the whole armour of God: the shield of faith, the helmet of hope, and the sword of the Spirit.

But notice further, "there was nothing in his hand." No sword, no staff, no weapon whatever. An adumbration, a hint of the New Testament again: "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual." To the eye of sense, the most defenceless babe in London is the young fellow, full of flesh and blood, who wants to hold the faith and fear of Jesus Christ. There is a spirit in London that laughs or roars at him. The manager of the Aquarium, full in his view, flaunts his shameless posters on high. 'Tis the sneer of hell at holiness. Just an expression, my brother, of the

contempt of the devil and the contempt of the world for your profession that you shall live pure—that you shall deny yourself to ungodliness and worldly lusts. All the devil has to do, he thinks, is simply to take a walk over.

Again I repeat it, the most defenceless man, the most defenceless creature in London seems to be the healthy ; bright, generous young fellow who, in the midst of this giddy whirl, with its gilded, its ungilded sin, wants to hold the faith and fear of Christ, to crucify the flesh, and live for God and for eternity. Wonder of wonders ! He is not defenceless. Marvel of marvels, miracle of miracles, joy of heaven, disappointment of hell, he is not overcome ! There are men and women in London to-day living a kind of salamander life ; living in the flame, with the roar of the lion, and the hiss of the serpent, and the rattle of the snake for ever in their ears ; noted, marked, signed for death—and they are not dead yet, and they never shall be. Yet they have “ nothing in their hands.” They seem to be feckless. How, then, do they live when others are pinned to the earth by the lion ? The Christian is not a stronger man than his neighbours ; then why does he stand where his neighbours fall ? Ah ! this is the explanation—the Spirit of the Lord is with him. He is a wall of fire round about him, and the glory in the midst. Do I speak to any backslider who has not been careful, and the enemy has sprung upon you, or the slimy serpent has dropped itself down from the branch of a tree, and wound itself round you ere you were aware ? Despair not ; do not give in. Remember Him who is the Strength of Israel. Even yet



while the folds of uncleanness may be tightening upon you, while the fires of lust have already kindled in your flesh, cry to God. Remember how thou hast received and heard ; and hold fast, and repent. God will deliver thee, like another Samson.

You remember how the Philistines, on another occasion, took him and dug out his eyes, and made him grind in their prison-house while they made sport of him. But in his bitter bondage he prayed to God ; he remembered the brightness of his spiritual youth and the love of his spiritual espousals, and God remembered them too. He returned to God, and God returned to him. Samson returned to faith, he returned to prayer—to the use not of carnal but of spiritual forces ; and he cried to God and said, “ Oh, hear me, that I may be avenged of my two eyes ! ” And God heard him ; and Samson bowed himself and brought down the pillars. And the dead he slew in his death were more than they that he had slain in his lifetime.

So do not be afraid. Are you down ? Make a struggle, and because you struggle God will struggle in you, and with you, and for you. Samson, call upon thy God. Backslider, remember, and return and repent. All is not lost. Call upon Him, and He will answer thee ; because He hath set His love upon thee, He will deliver thee. “ I will set him on high.” “ Thou shalt tread upon the lion and upon the adder : the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under foot.” What a victorious life we might live in the midst of the well-meant, destroying devilment all round about us, if we only used *the power that worketh in us.*

I know a man who received a letter by post, an innocent-looking letter, and he had only taken it out of the envelope and just unfolded certain enclosures that were in it when his soul was in a struggle. It was a letter from hell; an infernal machine meant to wreck him. And he fought and won, almost physically. He gripped that shining, gilded, artistic, classic uncleanness, and rent it in pieces, and pitched it in the fire. Do you know what I mean? Go home and burn them, and wherever you come near them stamp them in the dirt beneath your feet. No temporizing, no dallying: when the devil comes, the Spirit of the Lord will come too. Resist not the Spirit; quench not this light of heaven when it shines upon your soul.

“He had nothing in his hand.” Neither have we. No worth, no wit, no force, more than other men; but the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us. And in that connection what is true of our Master is true, in our measure, of us. The prince of this world cometh, and, to his intense disgust, the prince of this world findeth that we are not in—to him. The prince of this world cometh and findeth nothing in us. He flings all his darts, but they glance off harmlessly into the earth. The powder is damped; the sparks die out.

So much for the actual crisis. I am sorry the time is almost gone. It is a subject that grows upon one. The New Testament comes crowding in, asking to be used in exposition.

And now see how the story speaks to us in a very

innocent, naïve kind of way: "He told not his father or mother what he had done." For a young Christian that is very helpful. Samson had his fine points about him. Like a great many other giants, he was a modest fellow. It is said that small men are more or less "cheeky," and big men humble. I do not think that is the case. But with Samson there is a certain winningness about him. He did not tell his father or mother. Stop boasting then. Samson is wonderfully consistent here. He looks well in this verse. He seems to have known the power he had got, and that it was not the strength of his arm. He gave all the glory, no doubt, where all the glory was due. So let us: let us cease vaunting and talking loftily; for pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. There are other kinds of sins than the roaring ones that destroy the flesh. There is the lion of pride, and oftentimes that comes in after you think you have gotten the victory, and conquers the conqueror. *There are lusts of the mind.* While you are boasting of what you have done, and that you have stood where others have fallen, you are already prostrated by that proud, self-righteous, vainglorious spirit.

"He told not his father or his mother what he had done." He bore his blushing honours meekly. You may be like Samson. You may be a deal stronger and brighter than your fellows, and you may be able to cope with difficulties that overwhelm others. Cope with them, *and hold your tongue.* Do not go strutting and bragging; dinning into everybody's ears what you have done; provoking people to ask, "Where have you buried your dead?" and to say

sarcastically that there are not many of your sort to the bushel. I quite believe there are not. Humble yourself; keep quiet and watchful; and no matter how different you may be from others, never slack your vigilance. Perhaps you have escaped drink where others have not. Perhaps you have escaped a lot of things that others have not escaped. But remember Samson. He did not halloo; and it well became him, for he was not out of the wood. Take care; there is no cause for fear; but there is no cause for boasting. The right attitude always is, "Hold Thou me up, so shall I be safe." You always need to have the shield and buckler in one hand, and the sword in the other. Granted that you have won to-day, be as vigilant as ever. Do not sound your own praises; do not sit down, and become ungirt, and say, "Now I have attained." In that hour the devil pins thee to the earth; he got thee off thy guard.

"Samson told not his father or his mother what he had done." There may have been other reasons more pat to the actual circumstances. I grant I am accommodating things a little; but the accommodation is legitimate and valid. It is a grim death-business; silence well becomes us. Let us praise God, and speak to Him in psalms, and hymns, and holy songs; but before your fellow-men walk softly. Keep your eyes open and always ready, for there is a deal of hard fighting to hand as long as we are in this tabernacle.

Then another word briefly from the 8th verse: "After a time he returned, and he turned aside to see the car-

case of the lion: and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion. And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating." The picture is Samson going on eating that sweetmeat, and being refreshed by it; and you see at once the application of it. Sin faced, met, mastered, becomes a very eating and drinking as we go on our way. Oh, my brother, you know about that. If you have faced your own foes, if you have met and mastered by prayer and supplication these temptations that beset your life, if you have fought some well-won field, what strength it becomes to you, what a refreshing of the heart for many days afterwards. See how the believer's path is a path going on from strength to strength. When Samson came there to the carcase of the lion, it was filled with this luscious food, and he filled his hands with it, and went on eating. Lord, give us in London a band of young fellows from out this church who have honey in their hands, who make their presence a charm, a refreshment, and delight; with bright face, and happy heart, and hands filled with honey, ready to give to the passer-by. And the sweet all the sweeter that you know the reason of it. You can tell the tale about it that no other knows so well as you do—a temptation to dishonesty met and mastered: to tamper with your master's till even by a little; but that thing of the devil met, faced, and conquered. How your soul eats honey after it. Your hands are dipped in it, your mouth is filled with it, and you go on saying to yourself, "How the devil nearly cheated me. The devil said, 'If you want the honey, *if you want the honey*, sin!' The devil said, 'Sin is honey;' but

God has proved to me that holiness is honey." Crucifying the flesh is honey-sweetness.

A temptation to gambling springs upon you, and it seems to be "a safe thing," and there is no risk in it, and it will multiply that little amount by twice, or four times, or five times, or ten times, and you could do very much good with such a wind-fall, and so on, till it appears very plausible. A temptation like that, met in the old and only way—*it is written*, it is written, IT IS WRITTEN, "Thou shalt not steal! Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God!" Asking Him to preserve thee, when deliberately thou dost put thy hand in the fire! Asking Him to keep you clean, while deliberately you fill them with pitch! Asking Him to keep you from poison, when you lay the serpent in your bosom! "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," it is written, it is written, it is written. A temptation like that, met and mastered by the name of Christ, the blood of the Lamb, and the spirit of prayer, what a strength it becomes afterwards! Not giving pride to you, but giving glory to your Redeemer as you go on, just as Samson went on. Nearly lost, but altogether saved; unscratched, unscathed, unharmed, and a glad song singing in your heart. But I want to repeat that the world, and the devil, and the flesh all keep preaching to us, "You will get honey far easier; you need not fight the lion and run risks in order to get honey. Never mind that way, here is the honey spread quite ready." No, no. Take it that away, and I grant it is sweet to the taste. I am as human as you are; yes, it is sweet to the taste. Yes, sin is honey. Yes, to gratify the



flesh is sweet to the taste—but *it is gall and wormwood when it is down*. Fair to the look, but apples of Sodom, gravel in the mouth, after you have obtained it. Holiness seems to be hard and harsh; but “Be ye holy, as He who hath called you is holy.” And though the outer husk looks hard, the inside of it is honey; marvellous sweetness that no tongue can tell, and no heart can conceive. Do this to your temptations: get at the honey in the heart of their carcase, when you have slain them; thereby reading Samson’s riddle, “Out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the strong comes forth sweetness.” Amen.





# Regent Square Pulpit.

A FEW TURNS OF A KALEIDOSCOPE.

## A Sermon

PREACHED AT REGENT SQUARE CHURCH, ON SUNDAY,  
OCTOBER 26TH, 1890,

BY THE

REV. JOHN McNEILL.

TEXT—1 Kings xi. 21, 22.

LET me use this text like a kaleidoscope, giving it three or four turns, and try to describe what I see. And may the Spirit of God show us His truth. We have already read together the history of Hadad the Edomite, whom the Lord stirred up, among others, as an adversary to Solomon. Owing to the slaughter of his countrymen, the Edomites, by Joab and David, he, while only a child, was taken for safety to Egypt. There he grew up; found great favour in the sight of Pharaoh, and married Pharaoh's wife's sister, his son being brought up as one of the royal household. Then our text:—

“And when Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers, and that Joab the captain of the host was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, Let me depart, that I may go to mine own country. Then Pharaoh said unto him, But what hast thou lacked with me, that, behold, thou seekest

to go to thine own country? And he answered, Nothing: howbeit let me go in any wise." Solomon's history at this stage, and as illustrated by this incident, teaches us, first of all, a national lesson. Dealing with the incident as it stands here, there is a lesson for kings and all that are in authority. And it is something like this: Do not abuse your power. "In wrath, remember mercy." When you have your enemy at the point of the sword, remember mercy even while you remember justice, and pay off old scores. In David's time, Captain Joab, the mighty Joab, had been too severe—had he not?—with the children of Edom. He put all the males to the sword, and stayed for six months just to do this thoroughly. It was not only war; it was vindictive, revengeful, ruthless work. Joab's Israelitish hatred of these half-breed Edomites fairly glutted itself with slaughter. And Hadad, who was of the king's seed in Edom, being yet a little child, was carried away to Egypt. There he found an asylum in which he was nourished and grew up. Times changed: David died; Joab died; Solomon came to the throne. Solomon waxed greater and greater still; the kingdom rose to its highest power and fame. But by-and-bye there came traces of blight and decay. Solomon, in his old age, forsook the covenant of his God—began to die down at the heart in faith, in spiritual wisdom, in righteousness. His wives led him astray into idolatry and foolishness; and over all the nation's glory there came a dimness. And then—what then? Then old enemies, who, perhaps, had been almost forgotten, wakened up and remembered things.

Then away off on the outskirts, the Edomites and the Moabites, the Ammonites and the Syrians—wherever the carcass is, there the eagles are gathered together—they smelt the decay. The vultures began sharpening their beaks and spreading their wings.

Here is this Hadad the Edomite, whom Solomon very likely had forgotten all about, if indeed, he knew about him at all, “nursing his wrath to keep it warm.” He feels that his time to pay off old scores has come. He leaves the land of his exile to get into striking distance. When God wishes to chastise a nation, He has always at hand those into whose hands He can put the rod with the certainty that they will lay it on with a will. While they are serving God, or rather *that* apart, they are “remembering Flodden.” So here are the Edomites and Syrians, and, as we find from the history later on, the Moabites and many more, all hastening to the disintegration of poor Israel.

The national lesson we might learn is, that if we will be over severe, if we will harass the Jews, for example, as all nations have more or less combined to do, God will spread the lap of His skirt over the Jews. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” God likes to see justice done; but God will not have vindictive and sinful revenge, and He will spread the lap of His cloak over the Jews as he did over Hadad. They will find favour here and there, and by-and-bye they will rise and climb into places of power, whence they can deal with their oppressors, and give tit for tat. Let us harry and worry “those Irish” without mercy, dragooning them through generations, and they will go away to

America, for instance, and God will spread the lap of His skirt over them there. They will find favour in their exile home, and show that they were not mere vermin or brutes. They will rise, as they have risen, to wealth and power, and may trouble us, should God's time to flog us, like another silly, sensual Solomon, come round.

God may find his executors of vengeance in the descendants of those with whom we deal too harshly, or our fathers before us, long, long ago. Aye, they will spread through your English cities and towns, and play the very mischief with you at voting times, and make the balance "kick the beam" in most undesirable and provoking fashion. Proud England will be compelled to say, "Ireland blocks the way." We forget that God hates inhumanity, and God's heart repents Him for those who seem to be utterly trampled under foot, and denied the right to live. He has strange ways with Him, and He is worth watching. I do not desire to be at all political, in a bad sense. But no man can preach the Bible to his time without touching its history—and politics is history in the making. I do not speak in a party spirit; but may we not read out of our own day this old national lesson: the whirligig of time brings its revenges? Therefore let mercy season justice.

David and Joab were too severe with Edom; and now the Edomite is likely to see day about with them. Hadad flees to Egypt, he is taken into favour with the king, he grows up, marries the king's wife's sister, and his own child is brought up like one of the royal household. Then when he hears that David is dead, and that Joab is gone, vengeance is



sweeter than he cares to say Pity, of course, he could not get over it; pity those Irish don't forget; but greater pity that all men and nations, when they have the whip by the handle, don't remember that the whip may change hands. 'Tis a very human story, 'tis also Divine: *the Lord* stirred up an adversary unto Solomon; Hadad the Edomite, of course! Let rulers learn God is over all, and holds the balances; and when nations wax great, and mighty, and proud, and when God wishes to bring them down, He will use very human means of vexing them; and those who are wise will read their sin in their punishment.

Then there is the same lesson, not now from a national, but from a private and personal point of view. Do not be vindictive. You may have power to-day, but use it mildly; let mercy season justice, for you do not know what may happen to yourself; and long after you are gone. The roots of this business are very deep, and go very far back. Who were the Edomites? They were the descendants of Esau, as the Israelites were the descendants of Jacob. And long, long ago, in the beginning of things, when there were no Edomites and no Israelites, but just the two brothers, Jacob and Esau, Esau came in one day from hunting. Jacob was making a dish which Esau was fond of, and he took advantage of Esau, and got him to sell his birthright; and out of that came all this racial hatred and antipathy that never slept. Let us take care, then, when we are at the beginning of things; do not make any man an enemy if you can bind him to your heart as a friend, for you never know, you may be putting a stone into the

machine that will cause friction, and broken teeth, and dislocation for long and many a day. But lest I should be far-fetched in my exhortation, let me say simply, try to make friends. A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city.

In your hour of power be patient even to the evil, lest you be betrayed into sinful abuse of power. As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. I know a man just now, and this is what has come to him. Years ago he was in a certain business, and he was strong and flourishing. But he dealt in a very high-handed and dictatorial manner with one under him. He cast him out, or forced him to flee. And now—it has taken some thirty years to do it, but thirty years have done it—now that man who was cast out—Hadad over again—Hadad to-day has destroyed his former master's business. He started a rival establishment, has got on and prospered, and things have so come about that he who was up is down, and he who was down is up. Therefore take care; and just because you have the ball at your foot, and you have only to kick it, *kick it with discretion*. Be magnanimous; the day may come when you may need all your friends. Woe to you, then, if few are sorry for your misfortunes, because, on human grounds, they have so little cause to be.

But there is a spiritual lesson. "When Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers, and that Joab the captain of the host was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, Let me depart, that I may go to mine own country." And the narrative allows us to read between the lines, and see

what was working in his breast. Are there not some Solomons, spiritually, among us to-day? My friends, we outwardly still seem to be strong; outwardly, we seem to be what we get credit for being; but you know that inwardly you are dying at the heart. Your soul is getting weaker and weaker, and then what will happen? Old spiritual enemies, old lusts that have blood and heredity behind them (like the Edomites to the Israelites), temptations you subdued in your strong, vigorous, and righteous days, in your early Christian manhood, these haters of the Lord, who for long have feigned submission, may return. They are not dead yet. They are sneaking and hovering round about on the outskirts, and they will say to themselves, "This man is not so morally and spiritually strong, and vigorous, and thorough as we thought he was." There is a hollowness, and they will tap you at places, and then they will give the shock of battle.

Hadad comes back to do mischief to Solomon, for he has heard things and drawn inferences. It has spread among the surrounding nations that the strength of Israel now is not so strong as it seems to be. It is far more paste-board and stucco, than granite and marble. They come and afflict him whom erewhile they feared. So with individual men. Are there not men and women here to-day, and Solomon's history and danger is theirs? You are not what you seem to be. With all your credit and reputation, you are backslidden in heart. And these old sins, like vultures, are sharpening their beaks, and they are coming round upon you. For God's sake and thine own, take care:

hie thee back to God, return to faith, and prayer, and penitence.

Too much wealth, too much ease, too much flattery and adulation, too much getting of your own way, is going to well-nigh ruin you, as in the case of Solomon. They need not, if you would but preserve the pristine genuineness and ingenuousness of your first faith, and first love, and your first works for your Redeemer, whom you loved and served. But you are getting fat and over-grown; too fond of the table now, for example; that old enemy has come back. Thirty or forty years ago you never thought that you would become the almost glutton you are getting to be now. Thirty or forty years ago wine was no temptation to you—you could keep it easily in check. But to-day you would not like to tell how much secret fears come across you, that this Hadad has risen and grown. And now, when you are getting older, it is making assaults upon you, and finding out weakness where long ago there was sturdiness and strength.

Formerly, covetousness was next to nothing to you; and although you were a keen business man, and he had need to rise early who got up before you, and needed to handle his sails well who got to the windward of you; but is it so to-day? Are you not like Solomon, decaying inwardly; and covetousness—in your old age when you seem to have come to years and honours—covetousness is having at you. Oh, I could illustrate it in endless ways. In the morning of life, and mid-manhood of life, and in old age, no matter what may be our outward credit, and our outward reputa-

tion, hold fast by the living God ; hold fast by cleanness of heart ; maintain thine integrity in thee ; for the enemy is not dead—he never sleeps, he is hovering on the outskirts continually. Keep inside the covenant, and walk daily before God with all your heart. Edom, Syria, Moab, Ammon, are all where they used to be. Keep thou in the fear of the Lord ; and that, and that only, will keep them at their old distance till the very end.

So much I wish to say mainly to myself, and to the people of God who are here, for I believe Solomon belonged to God's people although he went far astray. But let us take care ; as Matthew Henry says, we may sin away our wisdom as Solomon sinned his away ; we may sin away our strength as Samson sinned his away ;—and it is remarkable that both men reached feebleness along the same line. Let us take care and remember if God sees fit to humble us and lay the rod severely upon our smarting flesh, these emissaries are at hand with which to do it.

But I want to use this text in an entirely different way. One cannot read this without wishing to apply it to a certain class of Gospel hearers in this land of ours, and very likely in this very church, to whom it may be useful. “ Hadad said to Pharaoh, Let me depart, that I may go to mine own country. Then Pharaoh said unto him, But what hast thou lacked with me, that, behold, thou seekest to go to thine own country ? And he answered, Nothing : howbeit let me go in any wise.” You see it while I read it. I know your thoughts are working, and will help me. This is the time that a soul comes to when, known only to

itself and to God, there comes across it yearning and discontent. You can hardly explain it to yourself, and do not like to speak about it to other people.

This longing comes to you, not when you are young and struggling, but, mayhap, when you are in mid-manhood, or growing age. Your earthly fortune is made, in so far as ever it is to be made. But there rises up in you something like that which is in Christ's parable: "I will say unto my soul, Thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry"—*and you can't!* There is a depth within you that yearns and says, "I want away." Like that Scotch servant whom you brought when you came to London. You made the mistake of bringing servants from Scotland with you. You had an idea about "these English people," and you thought there was nobody so faithful and true as Scotch servants. So you brought them with you, and, without saying they were unfaithful and untrue, this is what happened. One day your servant came to you, and said, "I maun away." And you say, "What is wrong? Have you not good enough wages?" "Yes." "Good enough food?" "Yes." "Comfortable room to yourself?" "Yes." "A day out when you want it?" "Yes." "Then why should you want to go?" And there is no answer but just "I maun away. Just let me go." And you say, "When will you go?" And she says, "If you'll let me, I'll gang the nicht (I'll go to-night). I cannot stay; I must away."

That comes into our hearts sometimes. It came into the heart of Hadad. Maybe it was not all vengeance, not



all a desire in his vindictive soul: "Now I'll have at Israel for what they did to my fathers in the days before me." Maybe there was something that belongs to pure patriotism and belongs to our sinless feelings. He could turn round to Pharaoh when he remonstrated, and say to him, "Yes, you have been good and kind, and Egypt's fat; but, oh, it's flat. The land from which I come is rugged with rocks and ravines. Here, in order to have a hill, you have to go and make pyramids. This flatness and sameness, and that sluggish river; oh, I dislike it all the longer I live here. I have tried to wrestle it down and content myself, and I cannot. In any wise let me go." "Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay." Better religion, God, Christ, conversion, with all that it may mean of hardship, better that than the world, with all its wealth, its pleasures, its leeks and cucumbers, its onions and garlic, and savoury stews. I want, I must have Christ, pardon, peace, hope for eternity. "I want away. In any wise let me go, let me go."

Are there none of us like this? Surely there are. Ask your own heart, and it will teach you. Does it not ring responsive to my poor words this morning? It is Hadad before Pharaoh over again. The genuineness of that feeling, may be tested by this: the sacrifice it will involve. See what Hadad had to give up; see the risks he had to run. This trial came upon him late in life when he was rooted, when the roots had struck down and fruits appeared upward. It is hard to transplant such a tree. And yet he ran all that risk. Am I speaking to any soul here to-day just in

that position? Surely I am. To become truly regenerate, sons of God will make a wrench. If you had become a true Christian years ago, it would have been, humanly speaking, kind of natural and easy. But now, for all these years, you have been away in exile. And you have got on, I don't deny it. But what, I repeat, is that yearning in your heart? Why are you not contented? Why can't you be at rest? Will it cost you something to put yourself right now, to go to Jesus, to become a Christian, to give up your world like Hadad, with its positions, and its honours, and its ambitions. Then all the more make the wrench. People may misunderstand, and may fling hard names at you. "What in the world is this that is come over you? A man whom I always took to be level-headed and most sensible! This is the very madness of romance. What novels have you been reading? What, in all the world, has upset your judgment? You have become as silly as a boarding-school girl." "There is no fool like an old fool." So we talk sometimes in our rough, harsh, inconsiderate way, forgetting that God and the powers of the world to come have fastened on somebody at our side. We dare to size them up, and measure them, and pass our flippant verdict when the great deep is being broken up, and the heart is crying out for heaven and home. "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy." We are so wise, and so sane, and so rational, and so sensible; why should anybody be disturbed when we are as satisfied with ourselves as Pharaoh with Egypt? It will be a wrench, but it has got to

be made. Hadad had no answer to give to Pharaoh, but he got off with him. I wonder how he got on with his wife when he got back to her, and said, "I am going back to Edom, back to its rocks and crags, back to its barrenness, its gleaming lightnings, back to its roaring thunders. I am tired of this land where it is always afternoon.

" 'Oh! for one burst on yon hill side,  
I'd give a thousand days like these.' "

What would his wife say? What would his servants say? What would all his fellow-courtiers say? "Hadad is flinging himself away. He has got moonstruck, or sunstruck. He has a chance to be Pharaoh himself, or his son after him." Aye; but when we come to this pass, what shall it profit us if we gain the whole world, and lose our soul!

Then make the sacrifice; go home—it will be hard; it may be like tearing the flesh from the bones—but go home and set up the standard there. "Wife, I am to be for Christ as I have never been before. Children, Christ for me as He never was before. No more dances, no more giddy shows and routs for me. I have opened the house to them more for your sakes than for my own; for I have felt increasingly my heart sick of them, tired of them, wearied of them. And I have an instinctive feeling that there is rest, and peace, and satisfaction that I have never known to be had by turning my back on them." Put all the distance between them and you that lies between Egypt and Edom, and peace will come.

Ah! yes. Thank God for times like these. All through

your boyhood, or girlhood, your open youth, your busy, bustling middle life, the world sufficed. But might I venture to accommodate Keble a little to describe the present state of your case :

“ Sin is with man at morning break,  
And thro’ the live-long day  
Deafens the ear that fain would wake  
To *Grace’s* simple lay.

“ But when eve’s silent footfall steals  
Along the eastern sky,  
And one by one to earth reveals  
Those purer fires on high—

“ When one by one each human sound  
Dies on the awful ear,  
Then *Conscience’* voice no more is drowned ;  
She speaks, and we must hear.”

Then there pours on our soul’s ear the voice of eternity, and our former joys become vain. Our mere baptized Paganism—that is to say, our empty formality in religion—is seen to be the empty shell it is. We have our “Intimations of Immortality” :

“ Hence in a season of calm weather,  
Though inland far we be,  
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea that brought us hither,  
Can in a moment travel thither,  
And see its children sport upon the shore,  
And hear its mighty waters rolling evermore.”

Thank God, He does that for men and women in London. He breaks in upon us, and our earthly ambitions and personal aims die down, and the soul cries out, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved. *And I must be saved*, cost what it may.” Our hearts are crying out for God. Your success won’t satisfy your

longing. Your good name in the city won't satisfy it. The fortune you have compiled won't satisfy it. Your son has been well brought up, and is doing well, and is well married, and that won't satisfy it. You have made the best of alliances on every side, but these don't matter.

“ Nae pleasures, nae pleasures, can mak us happy lang,  
The heart's aye the pairt aye that maks us richt or wrang.”

Now thank God for that dissatisfaction ; it is a spur in your lazy sides to send you home. What is happening to you is what happened to Noah's dove. The raven could sit pecking at any corpse on the water, and find its satisfaction there. But doves are doves, and not carnivorous. The dove found no rest for the sole of its foot, and it winged its way back across the black hills of water, back to that great ship that came drifting slowly along. Back to yon window, which is a kind of frame for the face of weather-beaten old Noah, standing there with his hand stretched out so that the weary thing may light.

So Christ Jesus comes to weary hearts in London to-day. And He holds out His hand and asks for weary worldlings to light upon it. He will take you into warmth, and light, and love, and peace, and an ark of safety that will ride all storms. Gleaming lightnings may flash past, the last judgment may thunder upon the world, all things be overwhelmed in the wrath that is coming, but your soul has reached its rest, its refuge, its abiding home. May the angels in heaven, looking down upon us, be fain to say of this one, and that one, and the other, “ Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows ? ”

God grant that every soul visited by this home-sickness that there is no arguing with may go home—right home to the heart of God. Oh, Egypt! oh, world! we won't quarrel with you, or revile you. In a sense, you are good; *but you aren't good enough.*

“I have heard of a land far away,  
And its glories no tongue can declare,  
For its mansions are fairer than day,  
And with Jesus I long to be there.”

“In any wise let me go, let me go.”





# Regent Square Pulpit.

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"I GO A FISHING!"

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## A Sermon

BY THE

REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

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"After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise showed He Himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of His disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered Him, No. And He said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord."—JOHN XXI. 1-7.

JOHN'S GOSPEL, which seems to come to a close with the end of the preceding chapter, is here re-opened that the incidents of the miraculous draught of fishes, and our Lord's colloquy with Peter, may be added. You can see John laying down his pen and rolling up his scroll, when he has put in the last sentence of the preceding chapter. "Many other signs," he says, "truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye

might have life through His name." There I believe John at first sincerely meant his Gospel to have ended; but that Holy Spirit, upon whom we depend for all our Scriptures, Gospels included, brought these things to his remembrance, and he eagerly unrolled his scroll and added them. It is thus not inaptly described by the expression, "a postscript to the Gospel." Of course, in speaking of it in this very human way, you are not to understand me, or misunderstand me, as in the slightest degree impairing the full inspiration of all Scripture by the Holy Spirit. What is inspiration? I do not know, and you cannot tell me. I went steadily for four years to a Divinity Hall, and I have never learnt yet what inspiration really is, and never shall. Like everything else, only a little more so, it is exceedingly difficult to define. What is inspiration? Once you go past the few texts, you are off the solid rock on to the sand: very hard-beaten sand it may be, but still sand, and not rock. But while definition is difficult, illustration is easy; and in this gap that comes in a man's memory I get an illustration of the natural, and yet supernatural way in which the Holy Ghost prevents a man from forgetting what He wanted to make known.

And it is not over curious in us, I think, to spend just a moment in asking why John should have put in the chapter that comes to us in this postscript form. Well, it might be sufficient to say that these things were added in this way just because of their interest. That is the reason underlying our own postscripts. We never tear open an envelope and add something under the symbols P.S. unless that something is so important that, now, having come to mind, the letter cannot be allowed to go without its being added. It would be no letter at all otherwise. Indeed, with a

certain section of correspondents it has become a bye-word that the P.S. is really the letter. So that this explanation might do for John's additional chapter—that the things there written were in themselves so interesting. Suppose that up to now the Gospel according to John had ended with the twentieth chapter, but that in some odd corner of the world an old manuscript was discovered which contained the twenty-first chapter, you can well imagine that when the contents of that find were verified, when it was proved not to be a Shapira fraud, but genuine Scripture, with what a thrill of delight we should hear read in all the churches for the first time the twenty-first chapter of John—we certainly should rejoice like those who find great spoil. Then it might be said—some have said it—that John added these things because he was thus enabled to tell a good story of Peter. John loved Peter, and Peter's character has never been any the worse, but a great deal better, for this twenty-first chapter of John. It did give John an opportunity to tell a story about Peter that he needed. Peter, like some of the rest of us, occasionally did things that were questionable, and that required somebody to write a certificate of character for him when he had by his own action defamed himself.

But I rather think that John added these things because, when they were brought to his remembrance, they would come to him in their bearing upon his purpose in writing a Gospel. What was that purpose? Why was this Gospel told four times over?—a good story is none the worse, perhaps, for being twice told; but it is a great deal the worse for being three times told; while it is often utterly mangled and murdered the fourth time. You know what a risk is run by this repetition. Have not critics in all ages said, “Yet, that is what spoils it; that is where we get hold of it and

tear it to pieces? If it had only been told once, a very large amount of critical strife and contention would have been removed; but in telling it four times, a great many discrepancies arise, and so we are able to cast doubt upon the whole thing." Now, I think it was told four times because it was told every time by the best story-teller that ever tried it. John wanted to write a composition upon this keynote—the essential Godhead and Divinity of that Man from Nazareth. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory." Not that John believed this more, and others less, but that was a side of Jesus that fascinated John. "I handled God; here is the head that leaned upon the bosom of Omnipotence." And like every true musician, he ends on the keynote with which he started. "These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name."

Now, the Divinity of Jesus Christ stands or falls virtually by His resurrection. Did that dead Man come out of His grave as your dead friend never yet has done—yes or no? Everything depends upon that miracle of miracles—did He rise from the dead? The doctrine of Christ's resurrection is a truth which must not be slenderly, but overwhelmingly proved. Oh, if ever yon dismal train of reasoning which Paul works out in 1 Corinthians, xv. should enter your mind—if Christ be not risen, faith is in vain, and the preacher a liar—you will search the Scriptures with trembling eagerness for every scrap of proof that Jesus Christ has risen,

and you will be thankful for the twenty-first chapter of John. *It is an added proof of that which never can be over-proved*—that He did rise from the dead. It comes out in the very first line, I think: "After these things *Jesus showed Himself again* to the disciples." As if He looked down the ages and saw that in this very age in which we live the destructive critics would leave the other Gospels alone, and fairly howl round about John's Gospel because of this high-pitched keynote, the Godhead and Divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. John as good as says, "Oh, ye critics! I'll cut out work for you. I'll break your hearts with instances!" "After these things Jesus showed Himself again," and again and again. Here is proof upon proof of what, as I have said before, can never be over-proved, that Jesus rose from the dead. As if John said, "Dear me, to think that I had almost forgotten this!" We believe this, do we not? Oh, yes! No; we do not. There would not be an empty seat in this or any other church in all London if we did. The trouble is that we have been born with big throats and wide mouths, and we bolt the whole creed, but digest almost none of it. I think we should be greatly benefited if a little wholesome doubt should enter our minds about the things which are believed, but which are never acted upon; if we were to follow out Paul's dismal logic, and land ourselves in his perdition. Thank God it is only a logical perdition, whose fires are warranted not to burn, for Christ has risen from the dead; and in order to make still surer our faith in that stupendous fact, John, I believe, added this chapter. He writes as though he feels that the *onus probandi* is upon him, and has not been sufficiently discharged; therefore this further contribution.

Now, there are two lines upon which we may follow out the story. First of all, let us look at the circumstances of the disciples, and then let us regard this miracle in its relation to men so circumstanced. Well, certainly they were strange circumstances through which these men were passing. About two or three years ago they had been called into fellowship with Christ, and with each other as His disciples, and that had meant for them a time of perpetual excitement. The fellowship of Christ to-day may be a dull, humdrum affair, but it was not so when these men struck hands with Him. And I would say here, young brother, if you want an exciting life, don't kick over the traces and go off as did the prodigal son—man, that is the flattest kind of life ever tried; but if you want a racy, bracing life, come and be a whole-hearted and out-and-out disciple of Jesus Christ. For the last two or three weeks, then, this excitement had been of the intensest kind. They had seen their Master betrayed by one of themselves; they had seen Him condemned, scourged, crucified, dead, buried. But He had risen from the dead; He had appeared to them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." He had given them their commission, and yet here they were away up in Galilee, as idle as a harrow in the frost. Certainly these were strange times through which they were passing, and yet I think this waiting for Jesus to come to them, as He had promised, was doing them good, and Peter's speech is the proof of it. We see them grouped together on the shore, that solemn little band bound together by this strange and tender tie, and talking one with another about what they knew of Jesus and what they expected from Him, their hearts ever and anon swelling with hope of His speedy advent among them. "Ah! He will be sure to come, and come soon." Thus at times would they utter the wish of their hearts; but at others, with minds burdened with a great fear, they would ask, "But



what if He should not come?" And very likely the wise man would come to Peter, the friend of former days, and say, "Now, Peter, didn't I tell you so?"—the man so wise after the event, who comes to us to rub salt and vinegar into our wounds. "You remember, Peter," this wiseacre no doubt continued, "when you were fascinated by that Jesus, and were just going off with Him, how at the time I told you what would be the result, and you see what has happened. You have seen Him condemned by the authorities, and put to death, and yet you are now back here again, and have invented some wild story that He has risen again, and that you expect to see Him. You are as mad as He, and will come to the same end." Ah! the voice of the world never changes to a believer who has not his Christ beside him. Under these circumstances of doubt and misgiving, I can imagine Simon Peter suddenly assuming a brave and determined look, and saying, "Well, well, whatever is to be or not to be, I'm going out to fish. Come He soon, or come He late, or come He not at all, our families are here, and there is plain, honest, homely work to do. I go a fishing." And, strange to say, Peter's look and tone were contagious. His companions said to him, "We also go with thee." Now that, I think, is a token that Simon Peter was improving, and that this time of inaction and of waiting was a part of their training, intended to strengthen their faith, not to destroy it. Watch yourself when you are going through a waiting-time, and when you find, no matter what philosophers may say, and young men in debating societies, that circumstances have cornered you, and you cannot move; that you are not their master, but that they have mastered you. Watch yourself in a waiting-time, when all life's plans and purposes for you are virtually stopped; take stock of yourself whilst waiting the arrival of some overdue ship, or train, or post, or man, for then, my friend, all the man or all the baby will come out in you. Have not we invented

a proverb to describe the man who will run a mile rather than wait a minute? These disciples had to go through a waiting-time, and I take Simon Peter's speech as a proof that it was doing them good. He is not now the blustering coward of the judgment hall, whipping out his sword, and striking—shall I say the wrong man in the wrong place? How did he miss a man's head, and cut off his ear, and cause our Lord to work—as I was almost going to say—a needless miracle? Simon Peter could have done far better with an oar than a sword. But now Peter is sobered, steady, set; our Lord's prayer and our Lord's hopes for him are to be realized after all, and some of the commentators forget that. What was that prayer? What were those hopes? "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee. Thou wouldst make a splendid devil's servant. Thou wast born to lead men either from God or to God. A small, useless, stupid man thou couldst never be, therefore I want you; therefore, with all your hot-headedness, and blundering, and stumbling, I have chosen you. I need men like you." And that prayer has been realized. His faith has not failed. He strengthens his brethren, and they say unto him, "The thing is good. We also go with thee." May God send back to His Church to-day a good score of Simon Peters, for as yet we have them not, though we have far too many of Simon Peter's critics.

Now, our Lord makes no mistake when He calls a man like this to Himself and to His service.

"A glorious thing is prudence,  
 And they are useful friends  
 Who are chary of beginnings  
 Until they've seen the ends;  
 But give us now and then the man,  
 That we may crown him king,  
 Whose Justice scorns the consequence,  
 That he may do this thing."

God deliver the Church from the paralyzing power of men

"Who never said a foolish thing,  
And never did a wise one."

The Church to-day has far too many men ready to put breaks on her progress—cautious men, cautious, very cautious—but far too few men of steam power; and when a Church is, as we are told, on the downgrade, she not only needs breakpower to stop her, but, still more, steam power to pull her up again, and we sadly need in the Church men to tell us what to do, and who go and do it. "I'm going to fish," said Peter; and in a time of paralysis, when men were eating out their hearts with fear and misery, not knowing what to do or where to turn, there rung out this one voice saying, "Let us do this," and they did it, and God Almighty met them.

And what ought to be the attitude of the Church continually, but the attitude of this little band on the lake shore? Just as these men were away up in the far corner of Palestine, and as yet Christ had not come, so are we away up in the far corner of the nineteenth century, and as yet He has not appeared. What are we to do? Our circumstances and theirs, it seems to me, are marvellously alike. Well, my friends, first of all I charge you to firmly hold the doctrine—nay, more than that, the expectation of our Lord's return. Bring that doctrine and thought round from the back lumber-room to the front of your mind. As you are, and where you sit, let us clearly and strongly hold that Christ is coming. He is coming—coming quickly, was the word He sent by the man who saw him last, and nineteen hundred years count for something either in God's calendar or man's.

But how are we to hold this doctrine, this expectation; for it seems to me to be an expectation which the Church has never very well known what to do with. It is true that she sometimes takes it down and looks at it to frighten herself, as it were, into good behaviour, rather than with

the intention of using it steadily and continually as a motive power. Well, I would say, let us not hold it as the disciples were prone to hold it that day; let us not go moping about the shores of time as they did about the shores of Galilee, and say, "Ah, would God that He would come!" I 'gin to be aweary of the sun, and wish th' state of the world were at an end." It is not the fact; you do not want the state of the world to end, for if it did end you would be in a mighty pickle. Don't talk like that, because nobody will believe it. Neither let us flatten our faces against the window looking out for His coming. That is how children wait. It is very fond, no doubt, but also very witless, and it never hastens the coming of the expected one. How, then, are we to hold this doctrine? As these men held it, only with greater hope and heart, because you believe that Christ is coming, and coming to-day, for aught you know to the contrary,—go out and fish to-day; do your day's work to-day with your loins girt, and with the look upon your face of a man who has the expectation that before night shall fall his Master may rend the heavens and drop through. Let us avoid day-dreaming and star-gazing; let us avoid sitting down with childish literalness with the Bible on our knees, and turning over the pages to see when He is due. It is not in the time-table, and wiser men than you and I have made fools of themselves by saying that they had discovered it when they had not. Let us avoid heresy on the one hand, and latter-day saint lunacy on the other; but, for God's sake and our own, let us hold this doctrine practically. Because we believe He is coming, go out and fish; go out and work, and you will surely find that to hold this truth will not spoil your fishing. It won't make us less eager, and less successful; but it will be the very thing we need to save us from all incidental disappointments, and wearinesses, and worries. And He is coming. To those who thus look for Him, He will certainly appear, either in that last glorious coming, or in timeous

gracious visitations like this, till the day break, and the shadows flee away.

"A little while with tides of dark and light  
 The moon shall fill ;  
 Warm Autumn's gold be changed to shrouding white  
 And Winter's chill.  
 A little while shall tender human flowers  
 In beauty blow ;  
 And ceaselessly through shade and sunny hours  
 Death's harvest grow.  
 A little while shall tranquil planets speed  
 Round central flame ;  
 New empires spring and pass, new names succeed,  
 And lapse from fame.  
 A little while shall cold star tapers burn  
 Through Time's brief night ;  
 Then shall my soul's beloved one return  
 With day-spring bright."

In the fourth verse of our text the scene changes. It is the dull, cold grey of early morning. The disciples had been toiling all night, and they had caught nothing. However, they had been toiling in the homely but sacred task of duty, and the Lord, who is the Lord of fisherfolk as well as of Apostles, comes to them. "The morning was now come, and Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was He." He hailed them: "Lads, have ye any fish?" and there came across the water a dismal bass chorus: "No." "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore John saith, It is the Lord."

Now, this miracle has for mankind a lesson, one face of which looks towards one's bread-and-butter and work-a-day life, while the other looks towards one's man-fishing, one's spiritual work for Christ. First of all, let us deal with the worldly aspect. These men were taught very sharply that morning that success in catching either fish or men must come from Christ. There are those who say that they

went to fish because they had flung away all faith in Christ and all hope in Him. I cannot entertain that view; it is not philosophical, it is not scientific. Why, if they had done that, that would had been a wholesale apostasy, compared with which the denial in the garden was only a trifle. No, they were just like ourselves; they did the right thing, but not perfectly. Christ told them, "You cannot get fish without Me, and you cannot go back to your secular life—you are spoiled for that." Ah, dear backslider, you need to hear this! A man who is a fisher or a fishmonger may become an apostle, but an apostle can never return to his old worldly calling. You will either be exceedingly miserable until Christ comes back and forgives and restores you, or the uncommon name and doom of reprobate, apostate, castaway shall be thine. It had been better never to have known the way, than, having known it, to turn aside from it.

But the night's failure and the morning's miracle surely taught them this—that Christ is Lord and Master in all departments of our life, and must be looked to with a single eye for all success that is worth having. There is a tone of interference in the very telling of the story that brings that out. Remember that these men were born and bred to the business of fishing; and so I grant that, under the depression of the moment, they were apt to think, "Oh, well; we can put in the time in catching fish until He comes back." That was their danger; and by the very way in which Christ interfered He showed them that they were wrong, and that He was their Master in everything, and in every department of life. He came to them; they did not know Him; and He, a stranger, gave directions to these born-and-bred fishermen. Have you ever tried to advise a fisherman? You had better not, for if you do you will very likely get an answer a great deal plainer than polite. But that is what the Lord did. He hailed them from the shore, and virtually told them,



"If you knew as much about your business as I do, you would have better speed at it." Somehow or another, Simon Peter had grace and sense enough—for often the two are synonymous terms—to check the word that was rising to his lips, and to do as he was told. And it was well that he did so; for soon the pull upon the back rope—I have been out with the boats all night—made John draw his breath, and dart the look and the word into Peter—"This is the Lord." So still does the Lord visit His people at their work, and claims the right to walk at large and at liberty through all our concerns, giving orders and getting obedience. But we draw a hard and fast line, on one side of which we are ministers, Sunday-school teachers, Christian workers, elders, and we are all for faith and prayer—of course, that is so orthodox; but then, on the other side, we are tradesmen or tradesmen's wives, and the world, the flesh, and the devil take it out of us right round the week. What has religion got to do with running a grocery or rearing a family? And even if it was not put in that broad, vulgar, downgrade way, that dull, stupid look upon your face says it for you. The Lord wrought this miracle in order to obliterate that dividing line, and that He might walk at large and with a free step through all our concerns. Whatsoever your trade may be, He is your Master; and all success in it worth having will come from Him who died on the cross to save you. The Lord claims the right, my brother, to come to you at your business to-morrow, to take you up to your desk, to reach down that ledger from the rack, and to open it before you, to point to that entry, and to say to you, in a voice that will remind you of the Judgment Day, "What does that entry mean? As you would not be cast into outer darkness, blot that out, and never allow such a system of accounting to appear in *My books* again!" That is the kind of Christ that London needs; and that is the kind of Christ I am here, in His name, to preach. God have

pity upon the man whose success is achieved simply because Christ is absent from him!

Then, on this interpretation of the Gospel, what a grand religion ours must be for working people—and we are all workers—especially those who are wailing, and toiling, and making little or nothing by it, except getting wet, and weary, and disappointed! In these days, when the word "unemployed" is continually in our ears, and the dismal thing perpetually in front of us, what a splendid religion is the religion of Jesus Christ! What a difference it makes between the unemployed man who believes in Christ, and the unemployed man who has no such belief! According to Cotter Morison, this religion is all for the other world, and not for this; therefore, he says, let us give it up; but if this miracle is true, that objection is overwhelmingly answered. These two unemployed men are not alike. *Toto cælo*—by the whole heaven they differ from each other. Don't tell me that the unemployed man who believes in Him who sits enthroned above the stars, and the unemployed man who trusts Him not, are the same. They are not the same. The feet of both are in the gutter, but the head of one is in heaven, though his feet be trampling the London mud. That, surely, is a mighty difference. Both alike must go round to the shops, and yards, and offices seeking for work; but he who loves the Lord, before he starts on his weary journey, goes down upon his knees before the Man upon the shore, even Him at whose girdle hang all keys of shops, and yards, and offices, and prays, "Lord, Thou hast done the great thing for me: Thou hast died for me; Thou hast given me a kingdom and a crown; wilt Thou see me lack a covering and a crust?" and such a man cannot be unemployed—he is glorifying God, and verily he shall be fed.

" His dwelling mid the strength of rocks  
 Shall ever stand secure;  
 His Father shall provide his bread,  
 His water shall be sure."

Blessed be God for the revelation He has made to us in Jesus Christ, to help us in the life that now is, as well as in that which is to come! If you are disappointed, if the fishing is not successful—why should I talk to the moon, and not right home to your hearts?—if your business is not paying, if your net is coming empty to the boat, or if your boat and net are sold and your occupation is gone, then especially is the time to trust in God—He will show you the right side of the ship.

I have left myself no time to speak upon the other face of this miracle, which looks toward that spiritual work in which, from the very fact of our being disciples of Christ, we must engage. Do not turn to me the back of your mind while still your face fronts me, and raise the plea that now I am speaking of ministers and Christian workers, and those who are actually under some kind of ordination. Nay, verily, my brother and my sister, if your fishing is not capable of being spiritualized, if it is not capable of being transformed, sublimed from mere bread-winning and fish-catching into soul-saving, then it is the worse for you. We can all see how beautifully the Apostles' trade was spiritualized: "I will make you fishers of men." If your occupation cannot be turned into the same sublime calling, in God's name quit it. If you cannot take Christ into your business, and so serve Him there, that you shall spread abroad such an influence, and flavour, and savour, and aroma of Christ's grace and presence as shall serve as a bait to entangle, as it were, in the meshes of a net those who come in contact with you, then wash your hands of it, and have done with it for ever. Only remember that in this fishing for men we must look to Christ for our orders, and serve Him implicitly. How many boats are plying on the dark waters of London, and yet how few fish are caught, how few souls saved! What is the reason? Either there are no fish to catch, or man-fishing has become a lost art among us. It cannot be that there are no fish; the waters are seething with what

we profess to be seeking. You do the same work, you eat at the same table, you sleep in the same bed with the damned, and you know it, and you are called of God to save such for His kingdom and unto His glory. If souls are not being drawn to Christ, it is not for want of sinners who need salvation. Then why should the net come empty to the boat so often? Is not this the reason—that we believe in Christ in a sort of dumb way, but we are not looking at Him and we are not getting His orders? "As the eyes of the handmaid are towards her mistress, as the eyes of a servant look to his master, so our eyes are towards Thee, O God!" That is the attitude of me as a preacher, for you as an elder, for every man or woman who is trying to win souls. To catch that kind of fish we must look to Christ. We must not trade upon past experience. We have no wit; we have no wisdom; it is our greatest folly to think that we have; and so the Lord gives us leanness and emptiness in order to bring us to a better mind. It is only when we come to our wits' end—and it is no great way from home—that we go down upon our knees and say, "Lord, come and help me; give me some real success. I do not want to go through the mere mechanics of man-fishing—it is wearing work—but, Lord, show me the right side of the ship"—and He will. Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was He. No; they expected Him, as we all do—*but not just there and then*. They thought of Him as *away somewhere*, when, lo! He was beside them. Let us go right here. Lift thy bent back, thou weary toiler for thy God. See Him; descry the Man upon the shore. Hail Him. Cry, "Master, help!" Oh, don't disappoint Him, as these disciples did. Send Him a glad shout of recognition. Then shalt thou have fruit of thy toil; nor yet be spoiled by thy success. Thy heart shall say, "This is the Lord." Amen.









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